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# sandhān

## Journal of Centre for Studies in Civilizations

Editor
**D.P. Chattopadhyaya**

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**S. Shyamkishore Singh**

Volume XI
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2011

Special Issue on
The Tribles of India

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The Journal of Centre for Studies in Civilizations, Sandhān, is a biannual journal. It accepts and publishes original articles from scholars and intellectuals in areas of interdisciplinary studies and civilizational dialogues.

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# Journal of Centre for Studies in Civilizations

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# From the Editorial Desk

The Centre for Studies in Civilizations brings out the issues of *Sandhan* – an interdisciplinary journal that takes into account the larger civilizational discourse with which the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture (PHISPC) is concerned. *Sandhan* has been in the forefront of the civilizational dialogue in India right from its inaugural issue. The present volume continues with the same spirit in projecting the conceptual issues pertaining to the domain of the philosophy, history, culture, science and social sciences from the civilizational perspective.

As always, we are grateful to all subscribers of *Sandhan* who continue to encourage us in our endeavours. We are in the process of publishing the delayed issues of this journal during this calendar year.

D.P. CHATTOPADHYAYA
Editor

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***ARTICLES***

**Subhadra Mitra Channa**

# Tribal Life Worlds and their Relevance in a Changing World

## WHO ARE THE TRIBES?

Although it is convenient to use the constitutional term, 'scheduled tribe', yet, all who actually deal with this category know that in the contemporary world it encompasses a wide range of people, from those living in remote islands and forests to those working in multinational companies and living in urban areas. When the term 'tribe' was introduced as a domain of study by anthropologists it had the evolutionary and colonial connotation of people caught in a time warp, people who had been arrested in their journey towards 'civilization'. I need not go into details of the criticism of this perspective, well known to most of us, yet we find that the hierarchical values expressed in this view of tribes as 'primitive', as representing the past of human society rather than its present has been retained to a very large extent by our policy makers and power holders. Unfortunately, even the tribal elite have been made to imbibe some of these values such that they now enthusiastically participate in a modernizing project that implies building of more dams, more urbanization, westernization and increased participation in a market economy.

The structural-functional perspective on tribes that followed evolutionism presented a romanticized view of timeless societies living forever in idyllic harmony where everything had a functional value. We know also that this was more of a myth than reality. As Wolf(1982) has clearly shown, what the Europeans had meant by 'lack of history' was only the absence of the Europeans themselves;

a view as Eurocentric, if not more than that of stage by stage evolution and the notion of some people as 'primitive'. Indeed the term tribe visualized bounded, coherent entities that were fixed in time and space as opposed to evolving and changing dynamic societies that were then legitimately entitled to rule the world. This historical legitimization of a created hierarchy has been criticized by Wolf who says, "The history of the West as it constructed itself is misleading because it tells a moral success story."

The question of harmony and synchronic equilibrium has also been shown as fictions that were being created even as the tribes under onslaught of colonization were being displaced, depopulated and destroyed; an apt illustration being Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders*, written at a time when they were almost depopulated and unable to get married and have children, as most of the clans were decimated to the point where a proper marriage could not be conducted. Yet in Radcliffe-Brown's powerful description of an integrated and stable society, one never comes to know about the misfortunes, the marginalization and the sufferings. It is not told that Radcliffe-Brown had never actually witnessed a marriage or a birth as one took place at that time. Each of these ethnographies is like an island floating on an infinite timeless ocean, forever near the Nuer or the Andamanese; never real historical societies.

The addition of the parameter of historicity to tribes has been a seminal contribution to thinking about them. But history has also raised doubts about identity, about people being pushed from one category to another, about kingdoms being converted to acephalous societies and castes being converted to tribes (Unnithan-Kumar 1997). Thus, as Axel (2002:18) points out, many such 'peoples' were produced through the process of representation which again was situated in a changing political 'force field' (Stoler 2002: 157). In my work on the Bhotiyas of Uttarkashi (Channa 1998, 2008) I found that the manner in which they had been represented in the gazetteers and early ethnographic work as a bounded endogamous 'tribe' was completely misleading as they were only a situational category with fluid boundaries and actually were composed of people from different locations bound only by the use of common resources and subsistence activities of pastoralism. Across the border in neighbouring Nepal, Fisher (2001) has reported a similar situation for the Thakali who he describes as having a culture that is, "flexible, permeable and malleable with fluid boundaries. It is continually reinvented and modified without being totally transformed"(2001:12). One can dig into ethnographies for numerous examples of 'tribe' being a shifting and ephemeral categorization and identities that were formed, not because of any primordial association but because they were anchored to external causes, like the princely houses mentioned by Black-Michaud(1986) that were the primary referent for the identity of the Lur tribesmen of Afganisthan. Marginality in itself can be a defining criteria as Caplan says about the Gurkhas of Nepal, whose only commonality was their "marginal position vis-vis the state, whose structures have been dominated since the establishment of the kingdom in the late eighteenth century by a ruling class composed almost entirely of members of high castes" (1995:52).

Another paradox often emerges when one comes in close proximity to the so-called tribes as many of them claim a different status than one that is accorded to them. Thus the Bhotiyas as well as the Kinnauries of Himachal claim high caste Rajput status but at the same time claiming the status and benefits of a scheduled tribe. A similar situation has been reported by Unithan - Kumar for the Girasia of Rajasthan where she finds historical evidence pointing favourably towards them being descendants of Rajput clans. Interestingly enough the so called tribal people find no contradiction in these convergent claims as they have never been taught by an anthropologist to make a distinction between caste and tribe. In fact as several scholars today point out, the very usage of these terms have been more a product of political and theoretical manipulations than having much of ethnographic reality. Thus, Fisher (2001:197) writes, "— there is a tendency within the scholarship of the Himalayas to use the terms tribe and tribal group casually, as terms of convenience, to distinguish hill populations from Hindu castes, and as a consequence, a precise understanding of the theorists' intentions and meaning of these terms remain elusive." Similarly Holmberg (1989) is his study of the Tamang of Nepal is in favour of using the processes of "formation, reformation and oscillation" in describing groups such as the Tamang than to look upon them as stable and given categories.

In the modern world there has ensued much debate as to who exactly the tribes are? Is it right to use the word 'indigenous' instead of tribe; or use 'ethnic minority' like in China, or 'native Americans' as in the USA or use a more encompassing word like Dalit to denote forest dwellers and border land people as representatives of the oppressed and marginalized. A key signifier here is the use of the term 'other cultures', a study of what Margaret Mead had called, 'cultures at a distance'; ones who were studied primarily as reference points and yardsticks to understand one's own culture, a point that Mead had made quite explicitly in her works on the study of sex and temperament and adolescence in the New Guineas where her primary goal was to understand these terms with respect to her own, that is American culture. These kinds of cross-cultural perspectives continue to be the strength as well as hall mark of anthropology and are seen as part of its seminal contribution to theory. Significantly such studies had impacted the western-centric mind set of the colonial or modern scholars giving way to the far more relativistic and decentered perspective of the post- colonial and post-modern era.

The use of the word, taken out from its colonial context and put back into a post- colonial context raises certain significant political issues. The process of 'othering' continues to prevail as long as some people control the academic authority and the right to both study and represent societies still seen as 'other'. In this sense even within the same country some people are on the margins of the collective 'national self and therefore become 'objects' of study and the tribes or the indigenous people in countries like India, USA and Australia continue to be relegated to this position. Like for example, when one uses the word, 'American', it is the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) that comes to mind rather than the Native American. Anthropology began as the study of other cultures, where these were the cultures of the people colonized by the Europeans but in the post-colonial era, the study of other cultures has increasingly come to represent the study of those peoples who are not in the mainstream of their own society that includes tribes, dalits, blacks and other such fringe groups. This particular usage of tribe as marginal is significant in most political activities undertaken by them especially since marginality is not confined to only economic or political, but to social and cultural dimensions also. The contemporary study of tribes has focused more on this inclusive definition more than any other.

However the problem of defining 'tribe' remains unfulfilled as marginality still leaves a wide scope of making other significant identifications. Sahlins for example had defined tribe in an evolutionary perspective as that stage of human society that roots itself in kinship rather than territorial identities. In other words to be a member of a tribe one has to be a member of a specific kind of kin group and not just be born in a particular geographical and linguistic region. However, in practice, the kin relationship need not be biological but can easily be one of adoption. Thus to belong to a tribe one needs to *become* a part of a kin group; it is the *becoming* rather than *being* that is important. One may also say that among a tribe one's fundamental identity is derived from kin rather than any other form of relationship. However since one can always become part of a tribe, as anthropologists often find themselves becoming, the boundaries of a tribe remain flexible (Channa n.d.)

The notions of boundedness and flexibility have also engaged the attention of contemporary scholars in their study of tribes. Is there, for example, 'a tribe'? The replacement or even supplementation of the word tribe with the now commonly used word ethnic group can also be examined in this context. Are there definite bounded ethnic groups or tribes that have a pre-given and consolidated Identity? Is this identity based upon any kind of primordial origin or genealogy? Or are they situational, constructed and self-serving and goal oriented. The answers to these questions can only be resolved by ethnography and in reality ethnographies have thrown up varieties of societies ranging from ephemeral to fairly consolidated identities. From the nationalist point of view such identities have also been seen as dangerous to the unity of the overall concept of the nation. The undisguised hostility of the state to the continuing existence of multiple identities is evident in the state's attempts to draw every one into the vortex of a so-called 'development'. The modern market with its uniform mass produced goods that can be freely offloaded from shelves of impersonal departmental stores serves this purpose quite well. Thus the state is trying to make uniform the economy across the board even as lip service is paid to 'tribal cultures' and 'ethnic goods'. There is a consistent effort to break down subsistence economies, to convert them into exchange economies dependent upon a global market. The rhetoric mounted against shifting agriculture and pastoralism is the case in point. As Sabherwal has pointed out, it is politics rather than the actual environmental impact of modes of subsistence such as pastoralism and shifting cultivation that makes the state hostile towards them. In my fieldwork in

Himachal, I found that although the Kinnauries were largely self-sufficient, almost not having to buy anything from the market, the state is now aggressively pushing them towards cash cropping. They are encouraged to grow apples as a cash crop that fetches good money then used to buy things from the market. Since the Kinnauires are as of now, depending very little on the outside for their subsistence goods like food, clothes, houses, medicines and household goods like carpets, utensils etc. they mostly use this cash for buying luxury goods and even to get a good education. But the traditional knowledge about varieties of food crops, forest produce, medicinal plants etc. are likely to disappear if the current trend of cash cropping along with auxiliary occupations like tourism catch up. In some places in Himachal, informants reported that maybe around hundred varieties of seeds are now lost, leading them to depend more and more on the market for food grains. Thus breaking down subsistence modes of production is one sure way of assimilation into a monoculture of consumerist capitalism.

Moreover, the continuous tussle between national and ethnic identities reminds us about the inherent contradiction between these two terms. To a large extent, the state also looks towards what it terms as economic reforms, the introduction of outside industries, destruction of local livelihoods and creating myths about the redundancy of non-capitalist modes of production to push forward its agenda.

## CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES

If we assume that tribe is a construction, then like Stoler(2002) we must identify the political-historical context of these 'constructions', and it is from these contexts it is possible to find a better way of identifying what and who can be called a tribe and for what reasons. One primary political mode has been to oppose the tribe to civilization and especially use the term for those who inhabit marginal positions, geographically, politically and economically. Since the state formation was coincidental with urbanization and formation of complex centers of power located in the cities; those who remained in the forests and hills were opposed to the ones who lived in the cities. Thus even today we find that most groups identified as tribes occupy the forest and hills and pursue modes of subsistence other than what brought about the two major revolutions of production, namely the agricultural and industrial. Thus, Guha (1999) writes about the forest dwellers being, "identified as the lowest stratum, to be linked with the wilderness, the jungle was by definition pejorative from ancient time down to the nineteenth century" (1999:17). As one looks at the stereotyping as it exists in the public in and the political mind even today, it still locates the wilderness as a place of backwardness and even danger. And this is a global phenomenon, Heatherington (2010:25) says with reference to the Sardinians (considered in some way equivalent to our tribes in Italy) that, "perceptions of cultural alterity in central Sardinia have informed economic and environmental policy in Italy, and how stereotypes of backwardness continues to be reified in media representations". Thus, even today whenever we hear politicians, academics and NGO workers talk about tribes, it is mostly in the language of 'development', "'upliftment', 'integration', bringing into the mainstream" or even being 'sheltered', 'protected' and so on. In other words, the agency always lies in the hands of the non- tribal' the tribes remaining forever as the 'backward' as well as 'infantile' other. Thus, the Freudian hypothesis about the 'primitive' as immature prevails even though actual tribals occupy every kind of status in society and may be seen everywhere to be no different from any one else. But the stereotypes are abstract notions that represent ideas more than facts and more importantly they reflect power hierarchies.

## WHAT THEN ARE THE REALITIES?

### The wise tribes

It is the concerns about the environment that have somehow worked towards not only giving us a conceptualization of who may be considered as a tribe, but also provide a rationale for understanding tribes not only as contemporary but also highly relevant for the changing world. But one must be careful about creating a second type of rhetoric even as the postmodern world has begun to look with transformed gaze at those who just a couple of decades back were considered primitive, savage etc. Although not everyone, but at least some environmentally sensitive scholars have realized that at least some of these forest and mountain dwellers have preserved systems of wisdom that may give us the key to the future survival of entire human kind. But at the same time, as Heatherington (2010:43) points out quite relevantly one must not rush into reifying and essentializing the so called traditional cultures, "which amplified the presumed divide between an industrialized, capitalist, 'western' heritage, and innocent, isolated, subsistence oriented indigenous cultures". Citing from Conklin and Graham's work on the Amazonian rainforests, she describes how the media and visual images of the people inhabiting these rain forests depicted them as, "products of their environment, rather than reciprocally shaping and shaped by it" (ibid). In other words, the tribes seen one way or the other, are denied agency and also the capacity for rational instrumental behaviour. They are viewed as circumscribed by custom and tradition; the opinions differ only as to how these custom and traditions are viewed disparagingly or admiringly.

Most people not directly involved with the tribes tend to overlook the fact that they are capable of manipulation, strategizing and adapting like any other culture or society. They are capable of rational, political actions that are relevant in their own context. For example, refer to the work of Mungleng (2002) who, working on her own tribe, the Taraos of Manipur, has shown through some excellent genealogical analysis, how the Tarao individuals manipulate and strategize to keep their clan structures going. They have been manipulating the clan structures, by both fission and fusion and also adapting outside persons through marriage into their tribe. There are narratives about the creation of new clans like the Chana clan founded by the adoption of a Maring boy and giving him the new clan name of Chana. She gives an example from her own data where a woman, the last representative of her clan is trying to keep her clan alive by adopting her daughter's son. The Chana clan itself, having become populous was divided into three lineages with different names so that the numbers of marriageable divisions increased creating better chances of reproduction in a demographically small community. In another case, a Maring married to a Tarao woman and settled in a Tarao village is now considered fully Tarao and given the lineage name of Tleitlap in Chana clan. She also provides the elaborate rules by which men from outside the Tarao group can become members of the Tarao clans. As I have already mentioned, the very fact that most tribes allow adoption into their kin systems indicate that the boundaries of the tribes were always porous and tribal identity and structure is not limited by endogamy as erroneously presupposed by earlier anthropologists. Mungleng also writes about the struggle of the Taraos to be included in the government schedule as a separate tribe and not as part of the Moyon as they were till about 2002. With a lot of political maneuvering and action taken, the Taraos were finally given this recognition. In other words the tribal people are not simple and innocent like children but adults with minds of their own, perfectly capable of self- motivated action.

Thus, if the tribes can play around with their social structure, at one time considered sacrosanct, then, what prevents them from transforming and adjusting to new life situations. According to Wolf, "Social clusters built up on kinship, therefore are in no way exempt from internal differentiation and external pressures for change" (1982:96). If some tribes are today fighting to keep to their traditional life styles and livelihoods like the Saoras of Niyamgiri hills, it is not an act of blind adherence to custom and tradition, but a rational act directed towards their own wellbeing. It may just happen to be that their world view does not coincide with that of the others. In all other respects there is nothing that prevents a tribe from changing. Indeed if that had been so then the human societies would never have transformed as all of us come from similar beginnings, those that today are called tribal.

Where does then one locate the reality of the concept of being a tribe? What is a legitimate and justifiable categorization of a tribe? From the above discussion it is clear that historically and also in contemporary times, the people who occupy fringe or marginal positions are subjected to a process of 'othering' and being referred to as a tribe is one of them. Yet it is this very marginalization that legitimizes the position of the tribe in terms of its claims to rights and resources from which it is otherwise deprived or was deprived historically. Also quite often the downward spiral of deprivation may push a people into the category of a tribe especially if they find themselves in a physically marginal area like the Girasia described by Unnithan-Kumar. " - fieldwork among the Girasia indicates that their increasing distance from state power has tribalised them more in outsider perceptions than any actual loss of their customs and sense of Rajput identity." (1997:18).

## THE TRIBAL LIFE WORLDS

The realities of being a tribe or a tribal can in my opinion, be understood best with reference to the environmental paradigm along with that on marginalization and poverty. Guha has coined the term 'ecosystem people' to describe those communities that live directly off nature or whose patterns of livelihood make them come in direct contact with the natural environment. A considerable amount of literature has focused on the indigenous knowledge and ecological wisdom of the tribal people. The term 'life-way', as used for a tribe has been defined as, "a concept that brings together indigenous human communities, the natural world and the realm of the holy beings"( Grim 2001:xxxiii).

Moving away from any kind of structural, economic or political definition, this particular mode understands as a tribe any community that has what may be called a "cosmotheistic" perception of life, the belief that "all natural parts of the world have a human like life force" (Carmichael, *et al* 1994:6). Here the emphasis is more on religion, world-view and cosmology and the increasingly felt relevance of this approach is in terms of the realization of the failure of the system of knowledge that we today term western science and its outcome, the industrial civilization. The environmental issues that are being increasingly and incessantly felt today have woken up the world to the fact that it is now witnessing the beginnings of the end. Looking at the tribal or indigenous people it was realized quite factually that the kinds of lives they are leading have continued and survived from millions of years. From the Paleolithic till today the hunting and food gathering ways of life have not only survived they have preserved the conditions of their own reproduction. Had it not been the impact of industrial and capitalist civilization on the forest resources, the water and sea; these modes of livelihood would have happily survived. As Fox(2011:33) puts it, " whether it is the marvels of our science, the magnificence of our literature, our industrial urban societies, or our bloated populations and their easy mobility, they are all very recent phenomenon, and as yet are still *experimental* phenomenon. They have not been around long enough for us to know if they will succeed."(emphasis mine) Of course here Fox is speaking on behalf of the western world; the use of 'we' indicates the white, western civilization. We can compare this with what Grim has to say about the indigenous people who are not the 'we' but the 'other'. "The first challenge embedded within the life way concept, then, is the need to understand the roles of indigenous religion in their efforts to maintain a spiritual balance with the larger cosmological forces while creatively accommodating current environmental, social, economic and political changes"(2001: v).

One significant difference between the western and tribal way of thinking is about nature. In western thought, 'nature' is passive but in indigenous (here native American) thought nature is" intelligent, inventive, changing, learning, teaching, evolving, acting praying, feeling and responding"(Forbes 2001:107). The significantly different way of relating to the landscape, of an epistemology based upon engagement rather than thought and a system of knowledge embedded in spirituality is what marks out the tribal from the 'civilized'. It is also not necessary that such life ways are lost with western education and urban influence although they stand a chance of being diluted. Peter Nabokov's remarkable book (2006) chronicles his remarkable journey through the length and breadth of native American territories where he found that not only were the tribes keeping their faith in their wisdom and knowledge, they were also protesting losses that they warned were not only for them but for entire mankind. For example the acute loss of ground water and desertification because of mining near the San Francisco Peaks was identified by the local Hopis long before the authorities became aware of desertification and stopped the mining in the year 2000 exempting seventy five thousand acres on the eastern slopes of the San Fransico Peaks from further mineral exploration. "But the Hopis didn't need studies to tell them that something was amiss. They were trained to watch the sky, the horizon, the animals and insects and water. At the springs that had risen from the canteens their wandering forefathers had planted in the ground, at wells and seeps, they were well aware that water levels had been dropping for years. The earth's blood bank was thinning. Something was shriveling the streams that ran like veins under their feet." (2006:143).

In a recent visit to the Khaśi territory near Shillong, I found that there were patches of thick green vegetation that I was told were the 'sacred groves' of the otherwise fully Christianized Khasis, who are also not at all averse otherwise to cutting trees. It is well know that all over India a large amount of bio-diversity has been preserved and cared for because of the belief in sacred groves and sacred sites. "What is known as a sacred site carries with it a whole range of rules and regulations regarding people's behaviour in relation to it, and implies a set of beliefs to do with the non-empirical world, often in relation to spirits of ancestors, as well as more remote gods or powerful gods or spirits"(Camichael et al 1994:3) also as in the case of the Khasis, "sacredness of ancient sites often continues after conversion to an universal religion like Christianity and Islam" (ibid). However, one must also be sensitive to the fact that such cosmologies are under serious threat from the pressures of urbanization, externally imposed models of development and most of all poverty. The very people who considered forest animals as their deities may be now forced to hunt them for monetary gains as their means of livelihood come under threat.

Yet what we are talking about is not isolated individual incidences but an entire philosophy about life and living. And this way of life makes sense not for any romantic or esoteric purposes but for the much grounded rationality of survival. It is to science that we turn to give us the reasons why a spiritual ecology, a way of life based upon communion and not competition with nature is better. For example, it is 'now well understood scientifically that for future survival of humankind and of the world it is necessary to preserve its biodiversity. Yet as Escobar puts it, "It may well be that biodiversity is the name we are giving to a complex, dynamic system that cannot be fragmented spatially or conceptually. The logic of collective ownership of territory is more attuned in principle to this perspective than that of individual property, which tends to lead to greater fragmentation of habitats and communities. From an ethno-ecological perspective, the multiuse strategies of local groups are more effective in maintaining habitat patchiness and heterogeneity and biological and genetic diversity." (2008:173).

Thus, in the contemporary world it makes sense to talk of a tribal way of life rather than about tribes as an entity. While the latter may be hard to realize in actual terms the former exists everywhere and needs to be preserved and given enough scope for reproduction. But a way of life cannot exist without a people and here tribes come in but not as people who have been uprooted or marginalized but as people who are still part of their own life worlds. In other words, there is no such thing as a rehabilitated tribe. Taken away from their habitats, their livelihoods, their gods and sacred places, they not only lose their identity, they lose their relevance. And when they lose their relevance the entire world is losing out because in their life world lies the key to our survival.

In the end, what I would like to say is that tribes are important not just as populations or genetic specimens but as a living life-world, a life-world that has survived many millions of years because of its wisdom. It is this life-world that has proven itself; it is not as Fox puts it, "experimental". It is tried and tested, and in the present contest the most rational. It would be foolish indeed to throw away this gem for a fake stone of 'development'.

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# The Clan-Caste Gond Society and its Religion: Past and Present

## THE STUDY

**This paper examines the religion of Gond society in a past-present continuum in which some questions are raised, and an attempt is made to answer them. The landmark change in this continuum was the introduction of the worship of Mahadeo in Gond religion and its subsequent ascendancy which led to Shaivite Hinduism being incorporated into Gond religion. This view could be a contested view because the received wisdom is the notion of Hinduism incorporating the religion of Gond people. The second half of the paper discusses the place of Gond religion in Independent India and its complex relation to Hinduism. In this section the living religious world of the Gond people in Nagpur region is examined. The paper concludes by examining questions of theory and practice.**

## THE THEORETICAL COMPLEXITIES

**Scholars and thinkers have encountered difficulties while defining religion. Weber felt that a "definition of religion 'can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study'" [1964:1 cited in Madan, 1999:1]. Others have "drawn attention to the problematic character of the task" and to the fact that there is much about religion which is ambiguous. How does Madan overcome this problem? For the "purpose of assembling a book of readings on religion in India" he decides to identify "a key idea and the broad framework derived**

from it". What is his key idea? His choice is "the notion of the 'sacred'" and the framework is "the 'sacred' as a particular class of phenomena, as a kind of knowledge, as a variety of activities in space and time, and as a typology of roles and persons" [ibid, 1999:1 & 2]. In this book Madan says that "so far as tribal religions are concerned, there is considerable material published, but it tends to be descriptive and lacking in theoretical concerns" [1999:20].

Why do studies on tribal communities "tend to be descriptive and lacking in theoretical concerns?" These weaknesses have arisen because studies examining tribal people make assumptions which are questionable. Merely because a tribal group changes and possibly "in the direction of caste, peasant, social differentiation, or religion" how does that negate their identity? [Xaxa, 2008: 26]. What is the mode of this kind of change? Scholars have identified a few mechanisms through which some tribal groups have got integrated into Hindu society. Kosambi (1975) has mentioned technology adoption by tribal groups as one mode. Bose talks of the Hindu mode of absorption where tribal groups are drawn into the system because it affords them some protection within it, "the system being non-competitive". Sanskritization "is also seen as a method of absorption". Sinha has argued "that state formation provided the definitive socio-political framework for the transformation of the tribal system into the regional caste system" (Xaxa, 2008:16 and 17).

Sanskritization, Hinduization, Kshatriyaization and Rajputization are some of the terms used to describe the "complex social processes" which have led tribal people into the Hindu society. Now, what does this absorption signify? Should tribes be treated as castes "just because there has been a process of Hinduization at work among them? Do they "cease to be a tribe and become caste?" Xaxa says that "while this may have been the case in the past, it is no longer true of India in the post-independence period".

He further says that "even after undergoing Hinduization, tribes by and large remain outside the hierarchical structure of Hindu society". Moreover, such claims become valid only when "the tribes have been drawn into the larger social structure of the neighbouring Hindu and linguistic community". "It is possible for tribe to become caste only after it has been assimilated into the regional linguistic community, such as the Bengali or the Oriya or the Assamese communities." Tribes were not only differentiated in opposition to castes but also in opposition to the dominant community of the region which invariable was a linguistic community. Does Bengali society cease to be a society in the wake of the processes of westernization and modernization occurring within it? The paradox is that nobody ever denies the existence and identity of Bengali society, but if the same process occurs within tribal society, the general trend is to negate its existence [Xaxa, 2008: 17, 18, 19 & 21]. The author cites the example of the Oraon tribe who practise various religions, speak different languages, and "yet they remain Oraon in some socially significant sense" [Xaxa, 1999:1519].

The study of tribes has primarily been constituted from the perspective of caste. Caste being unique and pervasive feature of Indian society, such a perspective may have been inevitable. Hence, tribal studies have become caste-centric. Tribes have been seen as the natural equivalent of caste; a contrast has been drawn between tribe and caste, and even change among tribes has primarily been studied in terms of their transformation into castes". Xaxa says that, "paradoxically, this has been the case despite the fact that tribes have been seen primarily not only as a society but also as a particular type of society. Ideally, then, the contrast should have been not with caste but with society, as in the case of Oriya, Bengali, Telegu etc. since the tribes represent all those features that are characteristic of a society" [2008:5].

This perspective has got strengthened further after Independence because of the constitutional provisions for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. One outcome of this constitutionalism has been to equate the tribal community with the *dalit* community and as Xaxa says that "although tribal people suffer from the same sorts of problems as the scheduled castes their historical experiences and social consciousness are markedly different from those of the scheduled castes. Hence to extend the category of *dalit* to tribes is to impose an alien consciousness on them. The kind of consciousness that tribes have of their own selves is not one of *dalits* but that of *adivasis*" [ibid].

One of the reasons why studies on tribal communities tend to use caste perspectives is because of the difficulties in defining the Indian tribes. This is because of the porosity of the boundary between tribes and non-tribes. Andre Beteille says that the "problem in India was to identify rather than define tribes". He further says that there is a "certain lack of it" between the definition of tribes given by anthropologist "and what they are obliged to describe as 'tribes'". They "have sought a way out of the muddle by calling them all 'tribes in transition'". But "this does not settle the issue because in India tribes have always been in transition, at least since the beginning of recorded history" [Beteille, 2006: 59]. What should be the term of reference to study a tribe? Why should a generic term such as tribe be applied as analytical categories? Why not use a concept or a term which the tribal people use to identify themselves? For example the term Gond in which the referent is to a "community of people" [Xaxa, 2008: 26],

Today the nature of this process is such that the tribal people would like to emulate the dominant community without necessarily "being part of that society by assuming some kind of caste status within it" [ibid: 19]. The subject matter of this paper is Gond tribe and their religion and from the brief discussion above, it would be evident that the subject is theoretically complex because of the ambiguities in definition.

## THE PAST: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS

### I. The Earlier Gond society

There are 622 scheduled tribes in India and among them "nine major tribal groups constitute about half of the country's total population, and they are concentrated mostly in the central, western, and eastern parts" [Maharatna, 2005:38]. Among these nine the Gonds form a major tribal group. They are concentrated in Chhindwara [MP], Bastar [Chhattisgarh], Nagpur and Chandrapur [Maharashtra] and Adilabad [Andhra Pradesh].

There "exists little accurate information on the early history of the Gonds, and it was not until Mughal times that Gond states figured in contemporary chronicles" (Furer- Haimendorf, 1985:14). The Gonds have a very ancient history dating back to the ninth century and Gond dynasties ruled over four kingdoms - Garha-Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda and Kherla. The Gond society is vast and must have lived in small groups, scattered over eastern Orissa and Bastar.

## *The Gond village*

Haimendorf in his study of the Adilabad Gonds says that village was an important social unit of Gond society and the Gond village had one unusual feature. Unlike the conventional notion of caste villages as timeless entities the Gond village was an epheremeral entity. This was because land was not scarce and people were mobile. A "period of expansion and prosperity would be followed by sudden dissolution and the desertion of the village site." In an anthropological sense, a Gond village has the following distinctive traits:

i. All the Gond households (HH) in a village consider one *Aki* post the visible symbol of the community's divine guardian.
ii. Recognise one headman (*patla*) as their secular headman.
iii. And one village priest (*devri*) as their ritual representative.

It is of no consequence that members join and leave a village. As long as there is continuity in the occupation of the village land and in the performance of the rites in honour of the village deities the village continues as a social and ritual unit. The Gond myths speak of a time when villages were inhabited mainly by members of one clan. Nowadays this situation does not obtain.

What gives strength to a Gond village is the ritual which precedes the founding of a village. The "rites and ceremonies that accompany the foundation of a new village transform an aggregation of families into a self-contained social and ritual unit". Many such villages "linked by ties of tradition, ritual and kinship" formed a neighbourhood. The "web of kinship linking the inhabitants of a neighbourhood facilitated movement within its confines. A man felt at home in most of the villages of his neighbourhood and the presence of agnatic and affinal kin in most of the villages permitted of a mobility and a frequent shifting of residence which used to be a constant feature of Gond society, but has recently been impeded by the growing pressure on land" (Haimendorf, 1979: 42, 43, 56, 73 and 74).

## II. Ancient Beliefs and Practices of Gond Society

The Gonds are primarily animistic. Animism is centered on the belief that non-human entities possess some kind of life-principle. Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* traces the beginnings of religion to man's emotional response to nature. What was the Gond response to nature? In their perception both the static and the living dimension of nature had their respective place of significance.

### *Plant and Animal Life*

Early supernatural beliefs recognised the mystical properties of the seed which grew into immense dimensions through reproduction. The tree is worshipped for its utility, size, strength and utility, but above all for the mystical properties of the seed. The sacredness of the *Saja* tree [*Termanalia frementosa*] for the Gonds arises because of its presence in death rituals. The *Mahuwa* tree [*bassia lattifolia*] is considered to be sacred and purificatory [Mehta, 1984: 316-317]. Certain animals came to be venerated on account of their qualities and in course of time anthromorphic gods personifying these qualities evolved. *Bagh deo* (tiger god) has a special place in Gond life because their god 'Lingo' was first recognised by a tiger [Mehta, 1984: 3156-316].

### *Evolution of Gond Gods from Nature: A Hill God Becoming Supreme*

In all tribal areas, animism reaches a stage when one of the gods or spirits becomes the supreme deity of the tribe. This happens if there is an unusual boulder of rock, or a mysterious natural cave, or the percolation of water on a mountain top. As the Gonds have moved over the entire Satpura mountains, and as they had their hill gods even in the eastern ghats; it can be concluded that the emergence of *Bara Deo* is another element in the growth of Gond animism.

### *The Sacred Mahadeo Hills of Panchmarhi Plateau*

The 4,384 feet-high Mahadeo hill, home of the God Shiva, rises from the southern edge of the Panchmarhi plateau. Beneath are the cave and shrine of Mahadeo. Nearby is the summit of Chauragarh, originally known as Chauradeo. The neighbouring sacred mountain is Dhupgarh.

Elwin correctly stated that "the gods then came into being by migration from outside and by the division of the tribe into various clans." It is probable that the innumerable hill gods of the Gonds were overshadowed by the emergence of Mahadeo who is identified with the supreme pre-Vedic god Shiva. Several Gond rulers became interested in the religious life of Rajputs and Aryans. The "spirit god Lingo emerged together with the worship of the great god Shembu, the Telegu word for Shiva." Lingo "the priest, prophet and god of the Gonds is associated with hill gods but he is not recognised as a supreme hill god" by all the Gonds [Mehta, 1984: 320,321, 322 and 378]. The supreme god of the Gonds of Tamia, *Bara Deo* is god of all the Gonds, and even of other tribes. *Bara Deo* is supposed to be the son of *Kadrangal,* the lord of hunting and Talba Muttai:

### *Weather and the Rain God*

In Wardha district the Gonds have a stick-dance which is supposed to usher in rains. The Gonds of Jeypore had a rain god called *Ispur.* The Gonds also had a god called *Indol,* probably a variant of Indira. In Jubbalpore, the Gonds placed four clods of earth in a line at the Akola festival in the names of four months of the year roughly corresponding to June, July, August and September. *The Gazetteer of Betul* mentions that the Gonds were aware that frogs can bring rain.

### *Spirits*

The Gonds believe in daemonical possession and recognise the power of female spirits to cause diseases like small-pox, cholera, fever, and even cattle diseases. Sometimes this belief led to the emergence of a powerful evil spirit like *Marai* who was worshipped by the Gonds of Chanda. These spirits were often marked by stones erected to represent their presence at each place. They have deities dealing with small pox, cholera, dysentery and fever and also the medicine-man.

### *The Gond Response to Death*

The Gonds have developed an elaborate system of worship of the dead in which they clearly affirm the concept of ghost-souls, which is known by the common name *Hanal.* They represent the male and female Gonds who have passed away. It "is such ghosts and ghost-souls who emerge as spirits controlling natural phenomenon, disease or death, which create the earliest concept of a god". The Gonds of Bastar believe that when a man dies his life goes to *Pogho Bhum,* the sky and the corpse which is created or buried goes below the earth, and becomes '*Hanal*'. It is there, that they erect the Menhir at the Kotokal or Uraskal. The practice of worshipping the dead is based on the belief that there is continuity beyond death.

- The dead have wishes, desires and needs which the living must satisfy for their own sake, as also for the benefit of those who survive after them.
- The *Hanal* or ghost soul in certain cases, remains with the dead body till stones discovered.
- The ghost-soul is capable of leaving the body and re-entering another body and that is how diseases are explained [Mehta, 1984:313 and 332].

## III. Gond worship: Temples, Sacred Objects and Priests

The Gond temple is hypaethral - open to the sky. Thatched shelters are provided to the high gods and the clan gods.

### *Worship of Sacred Objects*

Different objects are revered to mark the presence of spirits. For example the Gonds use wooden posts to worship the dead. Stones are also used. They give an impression of permanency and solidarity. In course of time the log-gods and sacred stones lead to idol worship. Mehta says that "after an analysis of the contents of Gond worship, it can be stated that the Gonds of Tamia are not idol worshippers. The Gond tribe worshipped log-gods and in Bastar they were known as 'Ango deo'. With the increasing influence of Hinduism these log-gods have disappeared [Mehta, 1984: 318 and 319].

Gond traditions demand that the *Persa Pen* symbol of the iron-spear point (sale) be never kept in a shrine but is "hidden after each ceremony in the branches of a mahua tree". This was the responsibility of the *katora*. The *Persa Pen* is supported by the bell gods and the chain gods and includes gagra or brass bells which are globular pellet balls with a slit opening. Their number in one bunch is equal to the numbers of wen in each phratry : four, five, six or seven. A symbol almost as important as the sacred sale is the white and black chauwur. It is a sheaf of hair tied to a bamboo stave. The white chauwur was wrapped in white cloth and the black chauwur in red cloth. Each was then placed under separate leaf shelters. The "chauwur and sale are more than mere objects required for the worship of the PP". They are symbols of deities who collectively form the clan god. The Chauwur bear a strong "resemblance to the ceremonial flywhisks used in Indian court ceremonial and temple ritual" (Haimendorf, 1979:498).

## The Religious Functionaries in Gond Society

### *The Katora*

During the great PP feasts, whisk, spearhead, brass bells and cloth are tied to a bamboo stave and a figure is created which is treated with the greatest reverence throughout the rites as the idol of the Persa Pen. To minister to this idol is the task of the Katora, the hereditary clan priest who plays the foremost role in the many rites and ceremonies constituting the cult of the clan god (Mehta,1984: 498 and 499). The Katora's primary task is to tend the ritual objects of his Persa Pen and the shrine sheltering them and he is responsible for hiding the sale, the sacred spearpoint, after each feast (ibid: 499).

### *The Patla*

Besides the Katora, who has both to minister at the sacrificial rites and tend the sacred objects, there is usually still another guardian of the clan deity which is today described as the Persa Pen's patla or Patel. Originally he was probably the hereditary headman of the locality containing the shrine of the deity and was thus partly responsible for its protection and upkeep. The patlas' duties are not clearly defined; he usually lends a hand in the organization of feasts.

### *The Pardhan*

The other important functionary is the *Pardhan* of the Persa pen, who is at the same time generally the House Pardhan of the Katora. He assists the katora in collecting contributions from clan members. Once the ceremonies have begun then he has a vital role during the central rite when the godhead is near and the noise of drums and shawms dies reverently, the soft sounds of his fiddle filter through the stillness and his voice, never raised, intones the ancient hymns that express the mystery of the rites, the unity of all clan members and their union with PP (ibid: 500 & 501).

## Menhirs and Cromlechs

The Gonds believe that after the death of a person, his *hanal* will enter a stone. In the simple belief arise the funerary rites, and the erection of memorial posts or pillars or stones. The dead are important to their neighbours and to the outside world [Mehta, 1984: 332]].

Among the Gonds there is a difference between clan worship and family worship of the dead. Clan worship means erection of pillars and menhirs, whilst family worship is centered on the "pot of the departed". Gonds "in all parts of Central India erect the *hanal gutta* posts and a *hanal gurya* cromlech. Strips of cloth are hung all over the Saja tree under which they are kept". The size of the pillar or stone and the skill in carving depends upon peace, strength and prosperity of the clan. Defeat, poverty, forced migration and submission to fate reduces the size and the skill. The "stone erected by the Murias was an upright menhir called uraskal from the Gondi word urasna (to bury) and Kal (a stone). The downfall of the present day Gond is represented by the absence of the kind of Cromlech described by Grigson" [Mehta, 1984: 335,336 & 337].

## IV. Gond villages and their deities

In contrast to the clan cult of Persa Pen "the cult of the village deities is the responsibility of a community strictly limited by the confines of a single village." Foremost among them are the *Aki Pen* (The village guardian) and the *Nat Auwal* (the village mother). Both "of them must be worshipped whenever the village community as a whole embarks on any ritual activity" be it one of the seasonal rites and festivals or a sacrificial rite (Haimendorf, 1979: 432). Aki Pen is represented by a square pointed post (*munda)* which is carved from teakwood and usually bears the symbols of sun and moon:

- Such a post is put at the time of the foundation of a village.
- And may be renewed when the wood begins to decay.
- There is no rule regarding the location of the aki post.
- The wooden posts are viewed as the seats of a deity independent of any village.
- Next to the munda there is always a stone known as *Gabur Aki.*
- And there should also be the four *Kon Aki* stones at the corners of the village site.
- For unless these stones are placed in their position the village is "open" and unprotected against magical dangers.

While Gonds migrating to another locality carry with them the symbol of clan and family deities, they abandon the symbols of Aki (which is left to rot), and erect new posts wherever they may settle down

- The *munda* as such has not the inherent sacredness of a *Persa Pen's* sale.

- Aki pen does not arouse in the Gond the same feeling of awe and reverence which *Persa Pen* arouses.
- There is nothing mystic about the *Aki Pen* posts (Unlike in the case of *Persa Pen*).
- Anybody may approach the post and the ceremony is informal.

### *Nat Auwal-The village mother*

The natural complement to *Aki Pen* (the village Guardian), is *Nat Auwal,* (the village mother) and most ritual occasions call for the worship of both these village deities. Unlike *Aki pen* the village mother is not represented by a conventional symbol comparable to the carved *munda* post. But at her sanctuary usually there are some rounded stones and a number of small clay animals presented to the goddess as votive offerings (ibid:433).

### *Other Village Deities*

Apart from the Village Mother several female deities, all referred to as *Auwal,* are worshipped. This *Siwa Marke,* the deity of the village boundary, is a figure of ambiguous nature being thought to be instrumental in bringing disease to the village in the rainy season, which accounts for a ritual destined to banish her to the boundary of the village land [Haimendorf, 1979:435].

## V. The cult of clan deities and the Lord of the Gods - Mahadeo

The myths recounting the origin of the clan deities and the deeds of divine ancestors form part of an elaborate cult which is one of the most vital elements of Gond culture. In this cult, the myths recorded are sung and recited by Pardhans bards on prescribed occasions and they link the ritual with the past in much the same way as the regarding of scriptures links a Christian service with historical events. Though the deities propitiated by the Gonds on one or the other occasion are many, it is mainly the cult of the clan deities, the

*Persa Pen,* which derives sanction from the sacred epics. The Shrine of Persa Pen (PP) is a small oblong shed with a thatched roof, too low for a man to enter upright, the ridge pole supported at either end by two stout posts, and the eaves by six or eight posts:

- In some of the older shrines the floor is built up of stone slabs, but in others it is a low earth dais the surface plastered with cow dung.
- The shrine is open on all sides and contains a low forked wooded post carrying between its three or more, rarely four, prongs a larger earthern pot, covered with an upturned earthen saucer.
- The earthen pot contains ritual objects used during the main cult acts: the whisk (chauwur), the brass bells, the red or white cloth and various smaller articles.

On slightly raised mud platform, running parallel to the ridge pole:

- Lie the sati (small stones coated with red paint).
- And the ban (flat earthen saucers used for earthen lamps and also much bedaubed by red paint).
- The sati whose numbers is generally equal to the clan's number of wen, represents legendary ancestors.
- Whereas the ban commemorates members of the clan priest's and clan patel's family, whose demise occurred in more recent times and whose names can still be recalled.

In addition, there may be a drum hanging up under the roof, spears planted in the ground or an iron or brass lamp-holder standing besides the sati and ban. Quite often however, the shrine is empty but for the pot, the ban and the sati and in some shrines even these symbols are missing. The most important of the *Persa Pen* symbols, the iron spear point or sale Is never kept in the shrine but is hidden after each ceremony in the forest in the branches of a mahua tree. It is, as a rule, known only to the Katora or clan priest and one or two of his closest kinsmen.

Some fifty to a hundred yards from the shrine lies the pen-gara, the gods' fest place and there are usually to be found the framework of two square booths. At the time of feasts the framework is covered with leafy branches and the booths are used as sunshelters, the larger by the Gonds and the smaller by the Pardhans. These are the general characteristics of cult places permanently located on the clan's hereditary land [Haimendorf, 1979: 496 and 497]. The most distinctive feature of Gond religion is the cult of the phratry and clan deities described by the generic term Persa Pen or great god:

- The cult of Persa Pen plays a vital role in furthering the cohesion of the clan.
- The belief is that Persa Pen protects all members of the clan demanding in return offerings and worship.
- A study of Gond myths indicates that the cult of Persa Pen emerged from older gods. For example, the cult of Manko (took the form of a *chauwur*) and Bandesara (took the form of *sale*).

### *Father Persa Pen and his Four Sons*

According to one legend, the Gonds in search of a sale approached Persa Pen, the Great God, who lived on an island in the sea with his four sons - the four "brother spearheads" (*biradar sale*).

- The four brothers agree to become the gods of the four original phratries and the Gonds promise to worship them thrice yearly with the sacrifice of cows and libations of liquor.
- Persa Pen seems to be male deities while Jangubai is seen as female deity.
- He is second in importance only to Bhagvan.

The cult of Persa pen forms the mystical tie between the members of a clan or sub- clan scattered over a wide territory and provides the only occasion for corporate action by a large number of clan members (ibid: 432).

### *The Lord of the Gods-Mahadeo*

Bhagavan, also known as Shri Shambu Mahadeo, stands on a level entirely different from that of the clan gods, the locality deities and the various mother goddesses. The concept as well as the name of this supreme deity, giver of life and death, and presiding over the court of immortals, clearly derived from Hindu ideas. Though Gonds consider him superior to all other gods:

- They do no accord him as much worship as to many lesser deities.
- At certain seasonal feasts coconuts, milk and various vegetarian substances are offered at the altar of Mahadeo which is usually situated under a banyan tree.
- These offerings are not accompanied by any elaborate ritual, and unlike the priests of the clan gods and other earth bound deities, the devotees of Mahadeo never fall into a trance or exhibit any signs of ecstatic conditions.

While the cult of other deities is confined to the Gond people "Bhagvan" is considered the supreme lord of the whole world worshipped by both Gonds and Hindus:

- Associated with the stone sculptures sacred to Shri Shambu Mahadeo is often a stone image of the Hindu God, Hanuman though Gond mythology provides no validation for this link'.
- The appearance of Hanuman images is undoubtedly due to the influence of Marathas who worship Hanuman as Maruti.

Bhagavan receives the reports of the four Persa Pen about the doings of the male gods and the report of Jangubai about those of the female deities, including all the mother goddesses who are subject to her (Haimendorf, 1979:436).

## THE PAST: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSION

### VI. Gond feudalism

Middle India is a place where high civilisations jostled with the tribal communities of hunters, food gatherers and shifting cultivators. The tribes of this region have been changing and in the turmoil and confusion that followed the Muslim invasions, some of the tribes taking advantage of their numerical strength rose to form kingdoms during the medieval period-Gond, Chero, Munda, Bhil in particular. These kingdoms, of course, were short lived as they fell before the superior forces of the Mughals, Marathas and eventually the English [Mishra, 1989; 124]. Gond success seems to have begun in Bastar and their rulership covered the entire districts of Mandla, Jubbalpore, Hoshangabad, Chhindwara, Seoni, Balaghat, Betul and Nagpur. Gond rulership began by occupation of land, establishing garh, small zamindaris and finally rajas and kingdoms Mehta: 629 and 631].

### *The Beginnings*

In the earliest stage of life, the Gond people inhabited forests and tablelands and lead a life based on a gathering and hunting economy. They were animist and possibly may have known the legends of Lingo. It was a horizontal society since the Raj Gonds had yet to come into existence. In later stages under the influence of the Rajputs, Gond kingdoms and Gond legends started appearing. A class of ruling Gonds known as the Raj Gonds emerged and in the Gond kingdoms a vertical structure became visible. Gond society evolved into a feudal society. The concept of caste enters the clan-based phratries. Gonds started owning land and became rulers. Raj Gonds emerged as a status groups [Mehta, 1984:426].

### *Gond Feudalism Taking Shape*

The Gonds were the one of the first organised societies to build mud forts and later on they built strong forts of sandstones in Central India. They eventually built some of the largest and strongest forts like Chauragarh, Suryagarh, Asirgarh, Manekgarh, Singorgarh, and so on. In Jubbalpur district 52 forts were built. Similar forts were built in Hoshangabad and Balaghat districts. Another fort was built in Ballalpura in Chanda district by the Gond king Khandikia Ballal-Shah [1437-1462 A.D.], the founder of Chanda kingdom. As the Gonds clans emerged from their forests into Chanda and Mandla the forts became bigger and bigger and marks the beginning of townships and the beginning of the concept of 'Garh'. The important forts of the Gonds have the suffix 'Garh' attached to its name. It combined socio-political functions with those of administrative functions and represented a major change in the life of the Gonds who earlier used to live in small hamlets known as dhanas and tolas which contained thirty to fifty families. After the fort, the emergence of Garh is the second important landmark of Gond feudalism and with this development a section of Gonds ceased to be primitive. The story of the origin, rise, climax, decline and fall of Gond feudalism is a story of more than 1,000 years [Mehta, 1984:617-621].

### *The Agency of Gond Feudalism: The Emergence of the Raj Gonds*

The changes taking place in Indian society between the 14th and 19th centuries affected the Gond society. The Gond kingdoms of Bastar, Chanda and Mandla appeared after the Rajputs started associating with the Gonds. This was a reaction to the appearance of the Mohammedans on Gond homeland before the 14th century. The Raj Gonds became powerful in the secular sphere while the Pradhans in contrast came to exercise a powerful influence on the religious life of the Gonds. The Raj Gonds seemed to have originated in Chanda and they had three objectives: to usher in a radical change in the Gond social order, to create a Gond aristocracy, and to reorganise Gond religious life. Earlier

- 'podu', 'dahiya' and similar methods of shifting cultivation did not require land conquests, possession and ownerships.
- Feudalism began when the Gonds began plough cultivation and yoked the cow to the plough.
- The Pardhans in Chanda and Adilabad meanwhile introduced a rigid phratry- cum-clan-sept social organisation and each hamlet became a land-owning kin group [Mehta, 1984:428].

The emergence of Raj Gonds is a landmark in the history of Indian feudalism. There is no evidence as to how, when and where the Raj Gonds emerged but probably it was Chanda and Adilabad. They claimed a higher status because they emulated the practices of the higher castes. For example, they agreed to venerate the cow and wore the sacred thread. But there is no evidence that they claimed to be Brahmins [ibid: 435],

## VII. The Emergence of Mahadeo in Gond Religion: Pari Kupar Lingal as the Agency

Animism in its vivid form is expressed best in these deep forest and mountain areas. Here imagination, faith and tradition create a real world of the living and the dead. It keeps perpetual contact between the physical world of Nature and the supernatural world of hanals and menhirs [Mehta, 1984:337]. The only change which this world witnesses is more elaborate menhirs as a mark of respect and reverence for the dead. The greater the success in arms and in hunting the more elaborate is the rituals. These were not deep-rooted and fundamental changes. It is the contact with the Rajputs and Brahmins and the powers of the Chanda Gond kings that led to fundamental changes in:

i. Offerings of blood sacrifices
ii. The functions of a priest
iii. The organisation of funerary feasts.

This led to the philosophy of Shaivism and to Vedic rituals but a core of animistic practices continues. In the feudal period the Gonds developed a class structure. The upper structure of Raj Gonds introduced new caste traditions. For the Gonds two worlds emerged - the world of clans and the world of castes. While on the surface there have been many changes the core remains animistic [Mehta, 1984:339-340].

### *The Beginnings of the Worship of Mahadeo*

Shiva had taken antipathy to the Gonds, who were famed as hunters, and felt that they were spoiling the beautiful mountains, trees and forests. A legend collected by Capt. Forsythe and Rev. Hislop says [Mehta, 1984:525]:

*Killing, eating every creature,*
*Nothing knowing of distinction;*
*Eating clean, and eating unclean,*
*Eating raw, and eating rotten;*
*Eating squirrels, eating jackets,*

*Eating antelope and sambar*
*Eating crows and kites and vultures*
*Eating Dokuma and Adjutant,*
*Eating lizards, frogs and beetles*
*Eating cows and calves*
*Eating male and female buffaloes*
*Eating rats and mice and bandicoots*
*So the Gonds made no distinction*

One interpretation is that Shiva disliked the fact that they killed squirrels, snakes, rats, ants and so on and so forth. Shiva is the god of hunters with the title of *Pashupati*, the protector of animals. That the Gonds were fond of the squirrels' meat was known to God Shiva. He decided that that "the forest was no worthy abode for the unworthy Gonds" [Ibid: 706 & 707] and as the song below narrates the squirrel "played a great role" in the origin of the Gonds [ancient name is Koitor].

*Then the messenger Narayan*
*Call the Koitor all together*
*Called them up to Dhawalgiri*
*To the great God Mahadeva*
*Ranged them all in rows before him*
*In the courtyard of the Great god*
*Then the Great God washed his body*
*Washed a little of the dirt off;*
*Fashioned it into the likeness*
*Of the king of the squirrels - Warche;*
*Breathed the breath of life into it;*
*Down before the Koitor threw it*

*Straight the Squirrel then his tail made,*
*Seeking passage to escape them.*
*Jerking in and out among them;*
*And the Gonds began to chase it,*
*Crying, "catch it!" crying, "kill it"*
*"Let us catch and skin and eat it"*
*Some took clods and off they scurried,*
*After Warche, King of squirrels*

*Hip-cloths streaming, out behind them,*
*But the Squirrel - artful dodger-*
*Jerking in and out among them*
*Popped into a hole convenient*
*In the mountain Dhawalgiri.*

*And the Gonds all ran in after—*
*All but four that stayed behind them*
*Then a stone took Mahadeva*
*A great stone of sixteen cubits,*
*Shut them up within the cavern*
*In the mountain Dhawalgiri*

But Parvati did not share the irrational antipathies of her god-spouse for the Gonds and one day:

*She waked to find a something wanting*
*In the air of Dewalgiri*
*Then she grieved and thought within her*
*'where can all my Gonds have gone to?*

*Many days are our hill silent.*
*Once that echoed to their shouting;*
*Many days no smell ascendeth,*
*Pleasant smell of Gonds ascending;*
*My sweet-smelling Gonds, where are they?*

*And my Mahadeva, also*
*Him I see not; much I fear me*
*He has done my Gonds a mischief*
*And she grieved and took no dinner,*
*Prayed and fasted like a hermit*
*Devotee-like penance doing*
*For her lost sweet-smelling Koitor*

After "six months of penance at last her prayers were heard by Bhagwantal, *King of Gods,* whom Forsythe calls the 'unworshipped Bhagwan' unlike the Supreme Shiva who is worshipped. The messenger Narayan is sent to help Parvati; and Bhagwantal created the God Lingo out of the flower Pahindi to help Parvati, and search for the Gonds in the Iron valley".

Parvati "hardly plays any major role in the legends of the Adilabad Gonds". The bards of Adilabad have created another goddess of the name Jangubai. She works along with Pahandi Koper Lingal. Their relationship is not that of a man and his wife. The male and the female god are both known by the name 'pen' and the plural is 'penk'. They successfully free the Gonds from the cave. Both Lingo and Jangubai are 'penk' of animistic origin; but their role in the lives of all Gond tribes probably helped to develop the deity concepts of Shiva and Parvati [Mehta, 1984: 181,182 & 183]. Who was Pahandi Koper Lingal?

## VIII. Pari Kupar Lingal (Lingo) - The Legendary Cultural Hero

Gond Bards continue to sing of the legendary deeds of Lingo-pen, the mythical originator of the Gond tribe. In Adilabad he is called Lingal while in Bastar he is called Lingo. He is their cultural hero and their ancient god who created the Gond clans and tribes. He taught them the rituals of gods, of the worship of the dead, of marriage, of hunting and of cultivation. Possibly he is a successor of Bhimsen [Mehta, 1984: 371]. Lingo as the priest, prophet, teacher and legendry hero seems to be animistic origin and one of the chief factors which linked the Gond tradition to Hindu traditions. There is evidently a relationship between the Lingo representing phallus in Hindu religious belief and the God Lingo, who Elwin believed, on the basis of his experience of Muria life, to be the creator and teacher of the Ghotuls. It appears that Lingo could be a link between animism and Hindu society. This link was introduced through various tribal prophets. It is difficult to ascertain whether Lingo represents a mere animistic god; or was there a Gond prophet of that name [Mehta, 1984: 365 & 366]. From the Forsythe and the Adilabad legends the following details of Lingo's origins can be surmised:

- Lingo was his personal name.
- He was created out of Pahindi flower
- He wore his hair in the style of a Shaivite sadhu.
- Misfortune attended his birth.
- He was brought up by a saint and was known as satodhar (saint), penpaniyar (servant of gods), and bhan (a devotee)

- To achieve royalty he was told by Shiva to do penance for twelve years.
- As a creator of a cult of phallic worshippers, his sexual life and experience and marriage are considered to be important. The Adilabad and the Maria legend agree that he had seven wives. The Maria legend says that they were Brahmins while the Adilabad legends say that they were witches.
- In the Adilabad legends goddess Jangibai took the help of Lingo to release the Gonds who were imprisoned by Shiva in a cave.
- The Bastar legend makes no mention of Jangubai, and instead Lingo has direct relations with 'Mahapurub' Shiva, and his wife Parvati.
- In northern Bastar he is the cult hero who taught the Murias the 'arts and practices of life and economy' [ibid: 367-368].

Thus Pahandi Kupar Lingal creates:

- the villages and clans.
- The *Persa Pen* and other clan gods.
- And gives them the sacred sale, chauwur, whisk, bells, staves and kanvas as their religious symbols.
- Agricultural economy emerges with the worship of Persa pen, the clan and household deities, the sowing, harvest and cooking rituals.
- The social order of phratries, clans and later sub-clans, and septs, make Lingo the creator of special rules of Gond exogamous clans.
[Mehta, 1984: 368-369].

In certain legends, Lingo becomes the creator of Ghotuls or youth halls. In the Nagpur legend, Lingo is a great musician. In the Betul version he appears in the role of a playful Krishna, so fond of the companionship of village maidens. Elwin says 'Hislop's and Trench's version are undoubtedly nobler to western and Brahmin eyes, but they are unreal in a Gond setting". In Rev. Hislop's version and in the "Bastar legends, 'Lingo is associated with the discovery of fire'" [Ibid: 369 & 370],

Lingo has been associated with the discovery of fire, of Mahuwa liquor and as a player of 18 instruments of music. But there are no shrines of his in Adilabad and his only shrine is in North Bastar. A Gond legend says:

*What did Bharat Raja say to Pahendi Kupar Lingal?*
*Amongst all these trees, which is the greatest?*
*Lingal looked searchingly around*
*Saw a tall palm tree.*
*"the palm tree is greatest."*
*"No, Lingal," said Bharat raja.*
*You say so because it looks tall,*
*But it is not the greatest.*
*The mahuwa tree is the greatest Linga.*
*Gold is obtained through it, liquor distilled....*

In the legend of the Gonds, Bharat Raja convinced Lingo that the Mahuwa was the greatest of all trees; whilst in South and west India, the toddy palm is the most popular. Verrier Elwin tells another legend. Lingo had given a feast and the guests seemed dissatisfied. His servants heard them say "the food was all right, they had been given nothing coloured to make them happy". Lingo went into the jungle and came across a hollow Mahuwa tree" where the corollas had fallen into the hollow filled with rain water and it had got fermented. Such "is the legendary origin of natural liquor" [Mehta, 1984:527 & 531]. True or untrue nobody can deny the great imagery in the legendary story of the visit of God Shiva to earth, his hostility towards the Gonds, Parvati's fondness for the Gonds and the brave deeds of Lingo in releasing the Gonds from their cave-prison [Ibid:368].

## IX. The Decline of Lingo

"What is the cause of the eclipse of so prominent a god, when Bara Deo and Mahadeo remain supreme in every Gond village" asks Mehta? Can the eclipse of the Lingo be traced to the influence of the Raj Gonds? The close resemblance of the Gond god Lingo, and the pre-vedic supreme deity Shiva are irrefutable. It is possible that Lingo was a real Gond, one of the prophets of animism, who created the essential elements for the origin and development of Shaivism at the hands of clever parenthood" [Mehta, 1984:364, 365 and 370].

Lingo, in spite of all his contributions, is eventually overshadowed by the worship of "Mahapurub," and finally by Mahadeo. *Persa Pen,* or rather Persa Penk, continues to remain as the traditional animistic high gods and clan gods of the Gonds.

- The influence of the Rajputs most probably led to the use of the prefix Bara; but the use of the Sanskrit prefix 'Maha' before the high god suggests the influence of Telengana Brahmins on Gond animism.
- The prefix maha is not used for Lingal instead of which pahandi kuppar is used. This suggests the Dravidian emphasis given to Lingo by the Adilabad Brahmins.
- Lingo belongs to north Bastar. There are no shrines for Lindo in Adilabad while the one at Semurgaon (north Bastar) is on the road from Atgarh towards Amar dera. Under a spacious roof lies the anga of Lingo. At another side is Ling Jiwa (or soul) which is a piece of iron shaped like a ploughshare wrapped in grass. The Adilabad legends say that Lingo was not a Gond and returned to Telengana after creating the Gond social order [Mehta, 1984: 318, 371, 372 and 376].

## X. Gond Society Entering into the World of Agriculture and Land Ownership: Understanding this Radical Alteration Through the Grand Narrative of Shiva-Parvati and Pahindi Kupar Lingal-Jangubai

The legend with a grand narrative hue has been the legend of Parvati, Longia and Shiva. Shiva was displeased with the Gonds and using the mystic rites of a hunter God imprisoned them in the caves of Dhavalgiri. Parvati, on the contrary, liked them very much. Parvati, Karta Sabal (the eldest son of God Shiva) and Longia (Shiva's personal and divine emissary) are associated with the creation of the 'sixteen threshing floors' of the Gonds [Mehta, 1984:38].

Haimendorf had pointed out that "without the knowledge of Gond mythology, it would be difficult" to understand Gond society". The legends of the Gonds have "lost sense of time and place." They throw light on "the earlier phases of Hinduism. *Shembu, Lingal, Jangubai, Shiva* and *Parvati* are the great gods and goddesses who create, contribute and explain the seemingly rational growth of Gond society.

The legends give evidence of totemism; and the totemistic clans emerge into Hinduised clans and larger tribes. The Raj Gonds emerge as a caste [ibid: 198-199].

These legends help to understand the clans and the phatries that built up a firm social structure which got weakened by the emerging caste structure among the Gonds during the feudal period. The legends gave:

- Careful direction for the performance of human and social duties.
- For the organisation of purposeful feasts and festivals
- And towards the building up of morale - both ritualistic and spiritual.
- Which gave strength and personality to the Gonds [ibid:201].

The bards of Bastar, Chanda and Adilabad have their own stories, songs and myths which animate the life of the Gonds in their scattered villages. As a result of sanskritisation these legends have been forgotten and

- Faith itself is weakened and during feudalism the individual tribal seeks his survival and prosperity in agriculture.
- The well-being of the clan gives way to the well-being of the family.
- The policies of the Gond rulers of Chanda, and the new traditions created by the Rajputs led to loss of memory and
- also the lack of will to remember.
- The Gonds suffered a severe struggle with the Muslims and the Marathas for several centuries, experiencing war, defeat and migrations.
- Now they only have faded memories of the past [Mehta, 1984:192-193].

The Gond legends of Bastar and Chanda and Adilabad reveal that the imprisonment of all the Gonds by Shiva was a symbolic attempt to radically alter the social structure of the entire Gond society. The Bastar and the Adilabad legends, taken separately, reveal that there might have been more than one attempt to introduce a kind of religious organisation which could produce a new social order [ibid: 409 & 410]. The attempt does not seem to have aimed at a complete eradication of the totemic exogamous septs, which had increased in number and covered very large areas, naturally creating clans with some kind of tribal consciousness. The effect of the new change is complex, because by this time Gond society was consisting of a number of tribes, living more or less in defined areas. Perhaps the northern and western regions of Madhya Pradesh had been partially occupied. The movement for social reorganisation could have begun in a few areas, and it may have taken a long time for the movement to spread to other areas. This change led to "god - based phratries, sub-divided into totemic clans" [ibid: 410].

There is a 'great imagery' in the story of Shiva and Parvati, the imprisonments of Gonds and the brave deeds of Lingo in liberating the Gonds. It almost appears that the Gond bards desired to close the chapter of a primitive society and usher in a new social order which is based on agriculture and the rituals of sowing and harvesting [Ibid: 368]. Srinivas says that as "the tribal economic base became precarious...the tribes sought economic security through closer attachment to the wider and superior Hindu society" [1977:227 cited in Maharatna, 2005:4].

## XI. Gond Religion and Hindu Religion: Old Gods and the New Gods

How does one differentiate between the old and new gods? The chief animistic gods of the Gonds include Phersa Pen, Bhimsen [originally it could have been Bhim Pen], Dulha deo, Ghansyam Deo, Thakur Deo, Hardaul and BaraDeo. Anthropologist nowadays makes a distinction between worshipped and unworshipped Gods. Can this be used to differentiate between the old gods and the new gods? Though belief in a god or spirit may be present, the degree of faith could be invariably different. Obeisance is given to Hanuman. The Raj Gond Zamindar of Harrai created a Hanuman temple which is in the field headquarters of this study [Tamia]; but the worshipping priest is a non-tribal person. Hundreds of Gonds visit this place. They do obeisance to Hanuman but they never do puja.

- They have great admiration for Hanuman, and his role in the life of Rama.
- They are very fond of reading the Ramayana.
- Most Gonds will not eat monkey flesh anymore.
- But they are not worshippers of Hanuman [Mehta, 1984: 318-19].

Worship is the visible evidence of belief and denotes the intensity of faith and the character of emotion. Bhajan mandals are common while Gond men and women are keen to hear the Ramayana. They speak of Mahadeo as their great Gond. But 187 villages have revealed their boundless faith in *Persa Pen* and Bara deo at the same time. Thousand of Gonds worship Lingo and yet an equal number have not heard of Lingo.

### *The Satpura*

In the Mahadeo hills it is possible to trace the links, associations and acculturisation between Gond animism and the religion of the Shaivites. The Satpura is actually the name of the western group of hills, and this group belongs to the region where Lingo was most known. The Satpura Mountains contains three main groups of hills.

- The original Telegu name was '*sat mala*' or the seven hills. The central group is named Mahadeo hills which contain the famous historical caves and religious sites associated with Mahadeo.
- Chhota Mahadeo, the perennial waterfall faces the Mahadeo hills.
- The eastern range of the Satpura is the 'Meykul' range beyond which lies the Bara Pahar or the twelve hills.

The sacredness of the region is made holier by the presence of the Narmada river which is considered to be holier than the Ganga. The holiness of the river springs from Aryan culture while the holiness of the Mahadeo hills springs from Gond animism - possibly a fusion of two cultures [ibid: 376, 377 and 378].

### *Vocabulary*

The use of the prefix 'maha' indicates a great religious change in the life of the Gonds. The word 'deo' has replaced the word 'Pen'. Such changes in vocabulary indicate the incorporation of Hindu ideas in Gond religion. It is significant to note that there is hardly a single Gond male or female who has not taken the name of Mahadeo on his lips and yet it appears that Mahadeo has not entered the clan or household religion of the Gonds where *Persa Pen* rules supreme. In the minds of the Illiterate Gonds and the emotions of daily worship there is a mystic unity between the unworshipped Persa Penk and the less worshipped great Mahadeo. One can discern in Haimendorf's *Religion and Legends of the Raj Gonds of Adilabad,* "the flowering of Gond animism into the embryo of Shaivism" [ibid: 375-76].

The hereditary guardian of Mahadeo hills was a Gond zamindar who used to collect pilgrim tax. This was the Almod zamindari adjoining the Bahmini zamindari. The Satpura mountains contain three group of hills. The central group is named Mahadeo hills which contain the historical cave and religious sites associated with Mahadeo. The valley below the hills joins the Tamia range. Within the historical cave there is a retainer of the aboriginal chief whose right it has been from time immemorial to act as custodian of the shrine and to receive the offerings of the pilgrims. Outside on a platform a Brahmin sits chanting passages in praise of god [Mehta, 1984: 376-379].

## XII. Social Structure of the Gond Society: The Phratries

The Gond society is elaborately structured and the basis of this structure is the four exogamous patrilineal descent groups known in Gondi as *Saga.* These phratries are not separate entities but complementary to each other because it functions through constant interaction in a long sequence of reciprocal obligations. They are mutually inter-dependent in two ways. One is their sharing of a common mythical history going back to their origins. Two other members stand to each other in the relationship of traditional marriage partners.

### *Numbers as Phratry Symbols*

Each of the four principal exogamous groups traces its descent from a definite number of original *wen* (divine ancestors). The numbers are reflected in the designation of the phratries as *Yerwen* (seven-brother), *Sarwen* (six-brother), *Siwen* (five-brother) and *Nalwen* (four-brother). These numbers play an important role in rituals and ceremonies.

- For example men of the six-brother folk make an altar-pattern of six heaps of grain in a line.
- The bamboo stave (*kati*) to which they tie their *chauwur* must have six internodes.
- And the number of brass bells attached to the stave must be six.

The unity of the phratry is manifested not only in its character as an exogamous group. In addition, there are many ceremonials and rituals which further reaffirm this solidarity. Does "it mean that phratries are compact social units, that they follow a common course of action or acknowledge a common leader? Under the present-day conditions this question must be answered in the negative. The phratry is an agnatic descent group with all members claiming descent from the same mythical ancestors. But their distribution over the entire Gond country is so wide that any general coordination of action is out of question. The phratry lacks even a ritual organization comparable to that of clan or sub-clan where the clan priest (Katora) and his House Pradhan have the same hereditary task of maintaining the cohesion of all worshippers of their Persa Pen. The Phratry has no such officers and, with the one exception of the Sarpe Saga, the Phratry has no common cult centre (Haimendorf, 1979: 81, 82, 92 and 93).

The system of four phratries does not extend to all branches of the Raj Gonds. While four phratries are found in Adilabad and the districts of Maharashtra south of Nagpur, only two phratries associated with seven and six - gods respectively occur among the Gonds of the northern Nagpur plain and the Satpura region. Possibly dissimilar Gond groups who in course of migration came into contact with each other and this led to a larger Gond society in which different phratry systems came into being (ibid:96).

The phratry system not only regulates the internal working of Gond society but determines to some extent the relations between Gonds and other tribesmen. The Pardhans and the Kolams have identical phratries. Gond society can operate traditionally only within the framework of the phratry system, and institutional relations - as distinct from casual business relations-are possible only with such communities as have a corresponding system of phratries. The phratries (*saga*) are firmly rooted in Gond mythology, and their establishment as the principal exogamous units in a myth which forms part of the spiritual heritage of all Gonds and Pardhans:

- The *pari* (clan) on the other hand do not figure in the cycle of myths which deal with the birth and liberation of the Gonds' divine ancestors, their settlement at Dhanegaon and the institution of the social order by Pahandi Kupar Lingal.
- Nor does the dispersal legend that tells of the settlement of the four *saga* at Bourmachua, Jamtokorvelikinagur, Gudmasur Patera and Ramtek Bamni contain any direct reference to individual pari (ibid: 98 & 99).

The principal functions of the clan and its sub-division the Khandan lie today in the regulation of marriages and in the cult of Persa Pen. Under modern conditions the importance of clans except in respect of marriage and ritual is on the decline. This is mainly because the present system of land tenure and the law of inheritance leaves little room for the right of the clan to prevent the diversion of the property of any of its members to persons outside the circle of clan members (Haimendorf, 1979: 120).

## XIII. Colonial Rule and its Impact on Gond Society

Chauhan says that till the end of the Mughal rule most major adivasi communities like Gonds, Kolis, Bhils, and Minas were recognized as 'dominant communities' existing in compact areas, having their unique cultural and social systems. It was with the advent of British imperialism and their attempts to widen the tax net that the State began to forcibly bring these communities under systems of revenue collection that were completely foreign to them [2009:57]. K.S. Singh says that "Whereas peasant society was monetized during the Mughal rule, integration of the tribal society into money economy took place during the colonial period" [1995:28 cited in Chauhan, 2009:57].

To increase the revenue from taxes led many of the local kings to join the colonial regime. The economy of these adivasi communities was of a subsistence type and quite different from the agrarian economy of the settled village. Production in the adivasi economy was for use-value rather than profit value. The demand for tax affected not only the economy but also the social organization of the tribal community. Social differentiation was not very antagonistic among the tribal people earlier while land was commonly owned. Tribal chiefs were no different from the commoners. This structure altered considerably during the colonial eras and it led to a series of adivasi uprising beginning in 1774 and about 14 uprisings have been recorded. This includes the Bhopalapatnam struggle in Maharashtra (1795) and the Gond rebellion, begun by Ramji Gond in Adilabad (1860).

## THE PRESENT

### XIV. The Evolving Gond Religion:
### The Gond Society of Adilabad

Professor Haimendorf says, the Gonds of Adilabad have experienced so many external interventions in diverse spheres of their social and cultural life that it would be surprising if their religious ideas and practices had remained unaltered. The four phratries (*saga*) and an elaborate mythology was the basis of their social order. Each phratry was linked with a deity whose cult and rituals united them. The clan deities (*Persa Pen*) protected them and the Gonds had no incentives to seek the protection of alien gods. But today, a new situation has arisen. The Gonds have become an underprivileged minority in their own ancestral homeland while their clan deities are no longer able to protect them [Haimendorf, 1985: 169-170].

There has been a weakening of the old tribal tradition through the erosion of the role of the Pardhans, the hereditary bards of the Gonds. Many of the rites to honour the clan deities have changed and "the most important of these changes is the abandonment of the sacrifice of bulls and cows under the pressure of Hindu public opinion. The slaughter of cattle and the consumption of their flesh by the worshippers was always an essential feature, not only of the-god feasts, but also of memorial rites to honour departed kinsmen [ibid: 170 & 171].

There has been very clearly the complete reversal of ideas in regards to ritual practices. What was once considered a duty, prescribed by sacred texts, is now described as sin. Cooked cow flesh was viewed as '*niwot*' (sacrificial food) and the offered to the *Sanal* (soul) of the departed during the traditional funeral ritual known as *jagurla*. Without cow sacrifice the jagurla rite loses much of its significance. It is not only Gond leaders who are advocating the giving up of this ritual but also reform movements led by Gond people which steer Gond religion in the direction of Hinduism without effecting, however, a total break with all traditional beliefs and practices [ibid: 172 & 173].

Professor Haimendorf gives an example of the transformation of the Keslapur *jatra*. In the 1941 *jatra*, Gond people in large numbers including neighbouring districts would attend this *jatra*. The rites were performed to honour the clan deity of the Buigoita branch of the Mesram clan. The focal point was a simple *sati* shrine, erected on a mound close to a huge banyan tree, and made of no more permanent building materials than a few wooden posts and a low roof thatched with grass. Near this shrine animals were sacrificed throughout the night accompanied by the blare of shawns, the roll of drums and the fiddle of the Pardhan. A significant part of the celebration was the appearance of the Atram raja of Utnur, carried in a palanquin, to adjudicate in disputes which throughout the year had resisted peaceful resolution in panchayats of lesser status [ibid: 175]. Today, all this has changed with state intervention and commercialization. Let me outline some of these changes:

(i) The old shrine of wood and thatch has disappeared and a new building has come up with grant from the endowment department in 1962.

(ii) Gond tradition equates the Keslapur shrine with Bourmachua, the original home of the seven - brother Folk. The Gond deity worshipped at Keslapur was Shri Shek, the serpent god who plays an important role in gond mythology. So the new temple was dedicated to Nagoba, the cobra deity which now has become common to both the Hindu and the Gond people. This has eroded the Gond character of the Keslapur shrine.

(iii) Animal sacrifice has been banished from the inner part of the temple and is now done furtively outside the temple.

(iv) Hindu-style offerings of rice, flowers, coconuts, and cash in front of the serpent idol4 are the practice now.

(v) Unlike in earlier days large numbers of Hindus visit the shrine. The transformation of the keslapur jatra from a tribal gathering devoted to the traditional worship of Gond deities to a great fair attended by thousands of non-tribals reflect the submergence of Gond culture in the ocean of Hindu practices.

(vi) The only Gond tradition still remaining intact is the introduction of the newly married brides of Mesram Gonds and Pardhans to the clan ancestors [Haimendorf, 1985: 177].

Even in the individual level there have been changes. Some important Gond personages have taken to Hindu customs, such as growing a Tulsi plant in the courtyard, and circumambulating it while reciting prayers and sprinkling water. They have given up meat and shun alcoholic drinks, "two taboos for which there is no justification in Gond tradition" (ibid: 180). Many reformers are introducing *bhajans.* Some of them are invited by Gond families to perform Satyanan puja. Many Pardhans had given up their work as bards and musicians and they no longer played at Gond rites. Now they professed to worship only one God whom they knew as Bhagvan. Some of the younger educated Gond men seek connections between their own mythology and Hindu scriptures and to interpret the former in the light of Hindu ideology [ibid: 178].

Professor Haimendorf says "one may well ask why populations who for millennia persisted in a state of almost complete self-sufficiency, having developed their own way of life and cultural individuality without any need for outside assistance, have now to protected and aided by government." He further says that "this question appears to be all the more pertinent as only one or two generations ago many tribal communities enjoyed the advantages of a well balanced ecology fully in tune with the natural resources of their environment and could boast an overall quality of life superior in many ways to that of large sections of the Indian rural population" [1980: 1 and 2].

Professor Haimendorf attributes this well-being to certain "outstanding characteristics of tribal societies." What are these characteristics? These societies had enough food, the social structure was non-exploitative, people were not indebted, nor were they dependent on outsiders and there was a remarkable tolerance in all interpersonal relations. If this was the case, then, how did the tribal people become a 'problem'? In his view the 'tribal problem' emerged when the materially more advanced populations invaded the habitats of the tribal society, occupying large stretches of the cultivated land and often reducing the former owners to the role of landless labourers. But the single most important cause of this silent invasion has been the rapid growth of the Indian population which between 1931 and 1971 more than doubled and is still increasing. The only living space for this unrelenting expansion was the sparsely populated areas of the tribal society (1980: 1 and 2). The simple beliefs and religious practices of more primitive tribal communities were less affected by this silent invasion than the complex systems of the Gond society. By virtue of being a larger category the Gond society had to interact with the Hindu mainstream while the interaction of the Chenchu people with the mainstream has been superficial. The Chenchus also had the advantage that cow sacrifice was not a part of their religious practice [Haimendorf, 1985:167]].

## XV. Indian State and Indian Society: From Voluntary Absorption to Coercive Absorption

The census returns of 1901 estimated that there were eight and a half million animist in India. All these who named their religion as tribals were categorised as animist (Risley, 1975:150). Before independence the tribal community had a choice of declaring their religion as animist or not in the census. Xaxa says that "soon after independence, both tribal origin and tribal religion/animism as the basis of census enumeration were done away with. Instead, tribals began to be enumerated as Hindus if they were not adherents of any other major religions". In effect it imposed an alien religious identity on an

Adivasi person denying then their religious identity. This administrative practice of the state is coercing the Adivasi community to integrate into the Hindu fold [2008: 81].

It is not only the state which is coercing the Adivasi. In the last two decades a conscious militant Hinduism is at work in tribal areas. In "his beloved Bastar, Elwin would have been distressed to see how the Hindutva parivar, through the Vanvasi Kalayan Kendras and the Shishu Mandirs and Ekal Vidyalayas, fought off the lure of the missionaries by transforming the Buddhadev or God of a universal world view, into deities like Shiva, Durga and Hanuman" [Rao, 2009: 64]. Even before independence many tribal communities were getting absorbed into the Hindu fold. In the earlier method, the absorption took place by means of economic co-operation and security, and to that extent the absorption was voluntary [Xaxa, 2008: 81]. What has changed now is that the process of absorption is coercive rather than voluntary in nature.

## XVI. The Defining Characteristics of Adivasi Religion and Adivasi Consciousness

Because the census does not recognise Adivasi religion does it mean that it does not exist? Does it exhibit features which demarcate it from other religions? Ram Dayal Munda provides some answers to this question. Other religions require a 'house of God' which is not the case with Adivasi religion. Nature and her elements are the 'house of God' for the Adivasis. Why not treat this as a distinctive identity mark of the Adivasi religious system? Established religions believe that after death a person goes either to heaven or to hell, but among the Adivasis the belief is that an Adivasi person after death comes back to his old home and lives for ever with the company of the preceding ancestors. The third important difference is that an Adivasi does not require a priest for mediating between God and human beings. Lastly, for an Adivasi, nature and man are complementary and supportive of each other unlike in the prevalent religious systems where man is seen as the master, controller and controller of nature" [Munda: 2].

These features are unique to the religions of the tribal community and in itself sufficient to accord them an independent place in the sphere of religion and identities. This could restore a Gond sense of the self to Gond people who in spite of experiencing more than a thousand year of acculturation has succeeded in preserving some features which are unique to their society. This ability and these features, are a mark of the inherent strength of this people.

Xaxa has spoken of Adivasi consciousness as an important element in the discourse on the tribal people of India. It "is on the basis of Adivasi identity that tribes are increasingly differentiating themselves from non-tribes, at least at the grassroots level. The declaration of 1993 as the International Year of the World Indigenous People has sharpened this identity, for this identity has now come to carry certain rights and privileges with it." But this consciousness is not "so much about the claim to being the original inhabitants of India as about the fact that the tribals have no power whatsoever over the resources) land, forest, river, mineral) in the territory in which they live" [2008: 38 and 39]. Adivasi consciousness is mainly an expression of a special relation which tribal people have with their territory.

## XVII. Religion of the Gond Society of Nagpur Region

In his book, B. H. Mehta refers to Nagpur as a "historical city with Gond traditions, architectural evidence and memories" and to "the old Gond aristocracy of Nagpur" [1984: xxix and xxx]. The Gazetteer says that the history of Nagpur becomes known with the "rise of the Gond kingdom towards the end of the 16th century". Bakht Bulund who ruled the highland kingdom of Deogarh in Chhindwara founded a city in the plains in 1702 known as Nagpur. His son Chand Sultan shifted the capital of the Deogarh kingdom to Nagpur and made it a walled city. With his death in 1739 the decline of the Gonds began and by 1742 the decline was complete with supremacy passing on to the Marathas. In a symbolic sense, the decline of this once ruling community was checked when in 2009 for the first time the city of Nagpur elected to have a mayor belonging to the Gond community. She then took the initiative to install the statue of the Gond king Bhakt Bulund Shah Uikey at the Vidhan Bhavan chowk in the city of Nagpur in 2011.

Who was Bhakt Bulund Shah Uikey? This king was the third or fourth in descent from Jatba the founder of the Gond kingdom of

Deogarh and the history of Nagpur begins with him. Bhakt Bulund went to Delhi and entered the services of emperor Aurangazeb where he performed some signal exploit and gained favour of the emperor who induced him to abandon the rites of Bhimsen and adopt the Muhammadan faith, on which he was acknowledged as Raja of Deogarh under the name of Bhakt Bulund. This name meant a person of high fortune. Bhakt Bulund appreciating the spectacle of the civilization and wealth of the Mughal Empire was determined to develop the Nagpur territory and it -was at this time that the Nagpur country received its first great infusion of Hindu cultivators and artificers, who were tempted away by him from their homes with liberal grants of land. This policy was continued by his son Chand Sultan and under him the wealth of the country so increased as to make it a desirable acquisition to the great predatory Maratha power already established in Berar. The success of the Maratha administration owes much to the groundwork laid by Bhakt Bulund [GoM, 1999:29-33].

Two features of Gond society in Nagpur needs to be taken note of. One is that the Gond people in the city generally refer to themselves as Raj Gonds. The Raj Gonds were the ruling class of the Gond community and they are juxtaposed with the 'Dhur' Gonds. The word 'Dhur' means dust. But with decline in the economic and political power of the landed Gond elite this system of stratification has lost its sharpness. The other feature is the language divide among the Gonds. This divide is between the Hindi-speaking and Marathi-speaking Gonds. At the time of Independence Nagpur was the capital of CP and Berar province and the language spoken in public was Hindi. Since 1960 when the state of Maharashtra came into existence there is an increasing use of Marathi. But the increasing use of Marathi has not led to a complete decline of Hindi because of the substantial migration of poor people including Gond people from Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh into Nagpur. The significance of Hindi can be gauged from the fact that the pamphlets brought out by Gond organisations during the unveiling of the statute of Gond king Bhakt Bulund Shah Uikey at the Vidhan Bhavan chowk in Nagpur was in Hindi.

To study the present practices of Gond religion a cross section of people from the Gond community was interviewed and their views are presented below.

## A. Nagpur Urban

### *Respondent One: The Iwnathe Woman*

Respondent one is from the Hindi speaking Gond community. She is a married lady with three children and works as a domestic servant. She is from Sewni in Madhya Pradesh and migrated to Nagpur about 15 years back because her husband is from this city. She belongs to the 7-God clan and they will not marry within the clan. Her main god is Mahadeo (Shankar). Mahadeo is never brought into the house. He is worshipped beneath a *saaj* tree. A stone could represent Mahadeo. Only men take part in the worship of Mahadeo. She also worships Devi, Hanuman and Lakshmi.

### *Respondent Two: The Wadiwe Woman*

Respondent two is from the Marathi speaking Gond community. She is married with two grown-up daughters and works in a college as a class-four employee and receives salary from the state. Her mother is from the 6-god clan while her father is from the 7-god clan. She says that her family is a Raj Gond.

Her biggest god is Mahadeo but her *kul deo* is *Waghoba*. Her biggest worship is of *Khodalpen* who is synonymous to *Waghoba*. She brings seven stones from the river, daubs it in red ochre and then worships them. On the day of Guru Purnima *Khodalpen* is worshipped where animal sacrifice is essential. Once in three years her family visits the Gond temple at Marsur (Bazargaon) which is 30 km from the city of Nagpur. This is a temple dedicated to *Waghoba*. In earlier times the deity of this shrine was kept high-up amidst the tree foliage. This practice was based on the belief that since a deity is a pure being they cannot be placed on the same level as impure human beings. They must in a physical sense be placed above human beings and that is how they came to live amidst the tree foliage. When times change ideas also change. Now the Gond god has come down and installed in a small shrine at Marsur. The respondent time and again emphasizes that the essential element of Gond worship is "band-baja" (Music-Dance). So when they visit Marsur a band party accompanies them. The other important element of their worship is animal sacrifice. Before the Marsur pilgrimage a goat is bought, a special thread is tied and let loose in the neighbourhood. Being sanctified no harm comes to the goat. Animal sacrifice means that the *naivedya* (food offered to gods) is meat. They also visit the Gond shrine of Kuwara Bhivsen at Parshevni in Nagpur district.

This lady told me that the Gond people of Nagpur celebrate Mahasivratri in a big way. They hire a big hall in the city where there is public worship of Mahadeo followed by celebrations. Even though it is a public function the participants are people exclusively from the Gond society.

### *Respondent Three : The Uikey Man*

He is 67 years and stays in a slum. He is from the 6-god clan and has named his religion as 'Adim', his caste-community as Gond and his culture as Dravidian. He worships both Mahadeo and a tree known as Mahua tree. The ritual part of their marriages is conducted by their priests known by the name Bhagat. His Gond neighbours belong either to the 6-god or 7-god clan.

### *Respondent Four: The Uikey Student*

The respondent is a young student pursuing his post-graduate studies in Nagpur. His Kul Devata is *Waghoba.* Last year he visited the shrine of Kuwara Bhivsen. This is a brick-cement structure and there is a statue which the Gond people worship. The marriages in their community is solemnised by their elders. He considers himself belonging to the broad stream of Hinduism.

### *Respondent Five : The Maraskolhe Man*

This respondent is a Gond leader in the city of Nagpur and since 1991 has been looking after the Gond shrine of Kuwara Bhivsen, which is located in a forested area in Nagpur district (eastern Vidarbha). This is a brick-cement structure with seasonal yatras during which buses ply from Nagpur to this shrine. There is a statue of the Gond god by the name *Bhimal pen.*

A more traditional Gond shrine is in Gondia district (eastern Vidarbha) at a place called Kachargad. There is no regular worship. Only Gond pilgrims visit this place during the annual jatra. This is a beautiful valley and the shrine of worship is a huge cave which can accommodate more than a thousand people. For the Gond people this cave is a reminder from their ancient past of the legendary primeval cave where Shiva had imprisoned their people till they were rescued by their great cultural hero Pari Kupar Lingo and Jangubai. The Gond god worshipped here is called Kaparlingo.

## B. Nagpur Rural

While a large proportion of Gond people dominate areas in Chandrapur and more so in Gadchiroli district a significant proportion of them live in caste villages where they are in a subordinate position. The Gazetteer of Central provinces says that when the plains people invaded the Gond areas "the Gond population retired to the hills rather than continue on plains, deprived of their jungles." The Gazetteer further says that where the Gonds do live in plains, some families among them establish a separate hamlet some distance away in a place where there is some resemblance to a jungle [Mehta, 1984: 638].

A somewhat similar situation is seen in the multi-caste village cluster known as Leri Gat gram panchayat1. Leri is the main caste village to which two Gond hamlets known by the name Gondi and Kisli are attached. Both of these two hamlets are away from Leri, they abut jungles and there is no human habitation ahead. I spoke to three women from the Kodape family (Gond) from Gondi village. A. was 75 years old, B. was 70 years and C. was 34 years.

### *Respondent One: The Kodape Women*

They say that they have no memories of the traditional Gond religion because their forefathers never showed them the ancient Gond gods. Even their language, that is Gondi, is dying out, but as a child she remembers the landed elite of the village speaking 'Gondi' language. One woman recollected the five pilgrimage visits which she had made to the Gond shrine of Kuwara Bhivsen in Nagpur district. This is the only religious institution in Nagpur whose origin is in Gond culture.

The Gond tradition of worshipping their ancestors and granting them a visible place among the living has been abandoned by the Gonds of Gondi village. But unlike the larger Hindu community of this area the Gond people of Gondi bury their dead. Another change among them is that during marriages they no longer serve meat. There is also the influx of other ideas. The Gonds of this village revere a Sufi saint by the name Tajuddin.

### *Respondent Two: The Khandate Woman*

That the Kuwara Bhivsen tradition is very much a living and a powerful tradition becomes clear from what the khandate woman told me. Her grandfather built a shrine to Kuwara Bhivsen in his field many years back. At present her father is looking after the shrine. The shrine is a small grassy patch beneath a lendi tree where a rude shelter has been built with sticks and leaves. Two stones daubed in red ochre is the only object of worship. In the month of *chaitra* the Khandate family organises a festival at this site where a goat is slaughtered and a feast is given to all those who come. The expenses are borne by the Khandate family and their well-wishers.

### *Respondent Three: The Kodape Man:*

PK who is a cultivator of some standing and an elected member of the Leri gram panchayat says that the Gonds of this area belong to the 6-god and 7-god clans. None from the 5-god and 4-god clans live in this area. These two clans are considered to be inferior to the 6-god and 7-god clans because they are products of mixed marriages.

Are the *Gonds* of Gondi Hindus? They celebrate Janamastami and also Ganapati, but not Mahalakshmi. During marriages the Gonds of Gondi do not serve meat. There is no regular worship of Gond gods or daily Gond rituals. Are they Hindus then? It is difficult to categorically assert that they are Hindus because they do not have regular worship of Hindu Gods or rituals. There is a slab-cement temple built by a caste Hindu absentee landlord but no regular worship takes place here. While they do not remember much of their traditional religion, they have not forgotten their Gond god Kuwara Bhivsen.

## C. What Scholars in Nagpur Say

In a long note titled the '*Religious Life of Gonds*' Shyam Koretti a historian working at RST Nagpur University discusses the ideas animating the religious beliefs of Gond people. The following paragraphs are excerpts from his note. There "was a common myth famous among all the Gonds that before man inhabited the world, all the space in the sky, all hills, plains the rivers and the oceans were inhabited by the Gods. It was also believed that God created the deities which never left the spot assigned to them. They used to perform their ancient functions. There were several field and hill spirits. However, with the advent of man on the earth the Gods became invisible and hid themselves in their assigned places".

The "Gonds had many Gods and Goddesses in whom they firmly believed. It was only when they were offended or invoked; they manifest themselves in some form or other. All these deities were propitiated by the Gonds in different ways, for different reasons". While the ways of propitiation and reasons for it may have been different it was extremely rare to find any representation of the Gond Gods. The Gonds represented their deities, if they made them at all, by stones, lumps of earth, bits of unshaped wood; indeed their shrines were always empty. The belief of the Gond people was that their deities were divine being and no idol or temple can define them. However over time "the rudiments of idolatry" emerged in the form of "worship of unworked stones" and also some rudiments of the concept of temple.

Gond people thought that their deities moved freely in the same sphere, which was the orbit of men and that invisible world, was an extension of the visible world". The Gond people believed in the existence of natural and supernatural divine beings. Everything in their lives was controlled by the divine beings that inhabited their houses, villages, fields, mountains, forests, rivers and burial grounds.

All spiritual beings differ from one another in nature, composition, function and character; some of those beings were good. Others had bad influences. They were beyond human control, human submission, and so devotion and reverences were needed to appease these powers. The chief animistic Gods of the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh were as follows: **Bhagvan** (the Creator), Bara-Pen, Budhalpen, Phersapen (the great God) **Mahadeo, Dulha Pen** (Bride-groom God), **Ghansam** or Bagroom-Pen (tiger God), **Hardul Pen** (God of cholera and wedding), **Kuwara Bhivsen, Nat Awal, Thakur Deo, Hulera Pen, Matiya-Pen, Narayan-Pen, Koya-Pen, Maswasi-Pen, Kanya, Marai Mata, Darti Mata** (Mother earth Goddess) etc.

Motiram Kangali a leading scholar of Gond society in Nagpur says that the central tenet of Gond religion is the belief in 'Salla and Gangra', that is '*pita* and *mata*'. They are known as Persa pen in Andhra Pradesh and Phada Pen in Nagpur region. The term 'wen' is used to describe life and the word 'pen' is used to describe life after death. The word "pen" means god. That is, after death people become gods. Kangali speaks of two distinct cultures: the Aryan and the non-Aryan; the culture of Ram and the culture of Ravan. For Motiram the legendary story of Shiva making the Gond people captives and subsequently Parvati releasing them is a story of Aryans enticing a non-Aryan god. The impact of Gond culture on Vidarbha and in particular on eastern Vidarbha is evident from the names of two of its prominent rivers, Penganga and Wainganga. These names reflect the meeting and the merging of two distinct traditions.

Shyam Koreti also brings in other distinctions between Gond religion and Hinduism. One important distinction is the sacrosanct role of blood in Gond rituals while it is absent from the great Hindu traditions. The type of deities worshipped by the Gond people is quite different from those worshipped in the non-folk Hindu tradition. In villages Gond people celebrate Diwali but there is one difference. Each village celebrates this festival according to their convenience.

The only conclusion which one can arrive at regarding the nature of Gond religion today is to paraphrase what an elderly Gond lady said to me. Her understanding is that in urban areas people from the Gond community follow both Gond and Hindu religious practices while in forest and in distant places there is greater practice of Gond traditions.

## XVIII. The Gond Socio-Religious System Today

Does the Gond religion today practice a religion which is distinctive from Hinduism? Even a cursory examination will reveal that many changes taken place in Gond religion and these changes all lead to Hinduism. The following is a list of these changes:

- The Gond people have given up cow and bullock sacrifice.
- The decline of the Gondi language.
- Dilution of Gond rituals.
- Absence of Gond religious shrines.
- The loss of clan land which was their homeland.
- The decline in the role of the Pardhan as Gond bards and chroniclers.
- The growing influence of Hindu gods and temples.
- The assimilation of Gond society into three very different linguistic groups - Hindi, Marathi and Telegu.
- The distance from forests and the growing Urbanisation and industrialisation.
- The oral nature of Gondi culture.

In spite of these changes there is something very different about the Gond society which marks them out from the Hindu mainstream. What is this distinctive characteristic of the Gond society? It is the four-clan ordering of the Gond society and the worship of the clan deities. This is a structural element because these clans are exogamous and the rules are followed strictly. This structural arrangement is completely different from and alien to the Hindu caste system. There is no practice of untouchability and very little of superior-inferior relationship. There is no occupational division. For Hinduisation of any category of people it is necessary that they fit into the caste system at some level.

The inherent strength of the Gond socio-religious belief system can be gauged from the fact that in spite of their complete economic and political decline the clan system and the clan deities are very much a part of the life of the Gond people today. Even without a priesthood or a foundational book the Gond religion has a materialist base and where Rao citing Elwin says that the purpose of the Gond religion was to "placate the vast other world of invisible and often hostile beings through supplication and sacrifice to protect mankind" [Rao, 2009: 64]. With the beginning of Gond feudalism in the medieval period the process of Gond people getting assimilated into the larger mainstream had begun. The Gond zamindars and rajas had played a leading role in taking to mainstream religious and cultural practices. But after Independence there has been a complete eclipse of this landed Gond elite and with that this process has been checked.

## XIX. Conclusion: Questions of Theory and Practice

This paper began with a brief discussion on the difficulties of defining religion. This difficulty arises because of problems of definition. A majority of Indians are identified as being Hindus but what is not clear is what defines Hinduism. Thapar says that "the common features of religion for the majority of Indians lie in the worship of mother goddess and the fertility cults and in the teachings of what have come to be called the devotional or Bhakti sects and the 'sant' and the 'pir'. Emphasis is continually given by historians to the spread of Hinduism as reflected in the Sanskritic tradition and to the spread of Islam symbolised by the Quran. Yet, so little recognition is given to the fact that in the practice of religion it is the local cult, the non-Sanskritic tradition which is often predominant" [1973: 51].

Trautman like many others have pointed out that "Hinduism as a religion is a complex and loosely structured entity without a central institution defining what orthodoxy is and imposing a degree of uniformity". Trautman further adds that possibly Hinduism could be viewed as "family of religions that have grown up together and therefore have a shared history and a mutual resemblance" [2011:108]. This provides a rough framework to explain Hinduism.

In a book titled "*The World of Ideas in Modern Maharashtra*" G P Deshpande discusses Vinoba Bhave's ideas on dharma and religion. For Bhave none of the dharma and religion is full and complete. They are as such only the ways or roads (*pantha*) of reaching god (or truth). This position, that all D/Rs are imperfect or incomplete, is unusual. Here Deshpande suggests that there could be a difference of stage of development or graduation from faith to religion. Perhaps, from this perspective, the Semitic religions are the only religions properly so called. Others are 'faiths' [2009:74]. If this faith-to-religion idea is applied then a framework becomes available to describe and explain the many strands of Hinduism. The core in both faith and in religion is a set of beliefs and practices which lead the believer to truth and god. The difference between faith and religion is in the degree of amorphousness which each exhibits. The former is less structured and less complex which inherently need not make it inferior to more complex structures.

Coming to the Adivasi community what is their perception of mainstream gods?

Can you tell us when Shiva was born?
Can you tell us when Jesus Christ was born?
We were here even before that.
And they were born much later.
They were born amidst human beings.
We were earlier than them.
[Chauhan, 2009:61]:

The major development impacting the tribal community has been the adoption of the Indian Constitution and the constitutional status granted to them under the rubric scheduled tribes. This has given to the tribal identity a kind of definiteness it lacked in the past. Until recently, a tribe was part of a regional system, and tribes from different regions had little to do with each other. As Beteille says "there is now not only a definite tribal identity enjoying a legal sanction but a political interest in maintaining and strengthening that identity" [2006:77 &78]. With the emerging tribal consciousness as a political construct it is only a matter of time when the Gond people evolve a unique socio-religious system as an answer to their rhetorical question in their legendary verse which runs as follows:

*In their heavenly courts and councils,*
*Sat no gods of Gonds amongst them,*
*Gods of other nations sat there,*
*Eighteen Threshing floors of Brahmins,*
*Sixteen scores of Telenganas;*
*But no gods of Gonds appeared there,*
*From the glories of seven mountains,*
*From the twelve hills in the valleys*
[*Mehta, 1984:38*].

## NOTES

1. In 2011-12 I lived for about three months in a multi-caste village called Leri to study caste and social exclusion. Two Gond hamlets known by the name Gondi and Kisli were attached to this multi caste village Leri, and they were a part of the study. The names of these villages have been changed.
2. In addition to my field study in the village I met a cross section of people from the Gond community in Nagpur. Two persons in particular shared with me their understanding of Gond society and also lent me their writings. Many of these writings are unpublished material. They are Dr. Shyam Koretti from the Department of History, RST Nagpur University and Shri Motiram Kangali a renowned Gond thinker and scholar. Section XVII titled ' Religion of the the Gond society of Nagpur region' is largely based on my field work in both the rural and urban parts of Nagpur district.

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# The Toda: A Community in Transition

The Toda people have been living for centuries and grazing their buffalo (*err*) herds in the hill district of Nilgiris in Tamil Ṇadu, India. The Nilgiris is also known as the 'Blue Mountains'. Its name is derived from 'neel' meaning blue and 'giri', mountain. It is believed that the hills are called so due to the flowering of the Kurinji Flower (*Strohilanthes kunthiana*), once in 12 years giving the hill a blue appearance. The official website of the Nilgiris districts suggests that the British 'discovered' the Nilgiris in 1818[1]. For many centuries the Toda have been living in the Nilgiri hills along with other indigenous communities. The total Toda population in the State of Tamil Nadu is 1560 (2001 census) out of which 1218 live in the Nilgiris district. The remaining 342 perhaps have migrated to the districts in the plains of Tamil Nadu to pursue other livelihoods. They are categorised as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) by the Government of India.

An understanding of the life-world of the Toda people will be incomplete if we do not take into account their relationship with their buffalo herds, their sacred dairy temples (*polyars*), the ecology, and relationship with other indigenous communities in the Nilgiris. This paper is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out by staying in two Toda villages between June and September 2006. Primary data was gathered using participant observation, unstructured interviews, case studies, and household schedules. Toda villages are scattered in all parts of the Nilgiri hills. On an average, the number of households varies from 3 to 4 in each village. As the villages are scattered in forest interiors and hilltops, access to these villages is tedious. Data was gathered during the fieldwork from thirty households belonging to 14 hamlets.

## I

The Toda do not live in an isolated area. It is the ritual, social and economic linkages among the indigenous communities living in the Nilgiri hills that shape the interactions of the Toda and other communities. Traditionally, the hills have been inhabited by another four communities i.e., Badagas, Kotas, Kurumbas and Irulas. These communities occupy different regions of the Nilgiri hills. David G. Mandelbaum has referred to the relationship among these communities as a symbiotic one (Mandelbaum 1941).

Early evidence of economic and social relationship among the Badaga and Toda comes from a written account by an Italian Jesuit, Father Yacome Finicio in 1603. He visited the Nilgiri hills and met the Toda people. In Finicio's letter as W.H.R Rivers points out in *The Todas,* Toda people are known as Todares who traded with the Badagas. "These trade with the Thodares and sell them rice, buying buffalo butter from them, which they carry to Manaracathe for sale" (Rivers 1986:723).

The Badaga are a migrant group who came into the Nilgiri hills from the plains of Mysore in the beginning of the 17th century (Walker 1986). The Badagas had the knowledge of cultivation. They continued cultivating after arriving in the Nilgiri hills. Today, the Badagas are a dominant group. They have diversified their economic activity. Many families own tea estates and operate other business. The Kota, traditionally, are honey gatheres, folk artisans (leather work, pottery, smithy) and musicians. The Kurumbas and the Irulas are hunter gatherers and shifting cultivators. The Kurumba are feared by the other communities for their ability to perform black magic. They are restricted to the peripheries of the other community villages. The communities entered into economic and religious (ritual) relationship with each other.

Today the symbiotic, economic and ritualistic relationship among the Toda, Badaga, Kota and Kurumba is no longer in its traditional form. The Todas no longer associate with the Kota. The Kota launched a mobility campaign in the 1930s and 1940s (Walker 2004). This was done to protest against the lower status bestowed on them by the Toda. They claimed an equal status with the Toda, as they both are brothers. Toda opposed their claim by questioning their sacred buffalo meat-eating habit. Reacting to the Toda, they withdrew their services of playing music at Toda funeral ceremonies. Kota musicians have not played music at Toda funerals for almost 60 years (Walker 2004). Further, they do not take the carcass of the sacrificed err; nor do they provide any articles like pots and cloth to Toda for any ceremony. The Toda now arrange for a professional musical band from Ooty for their funeral ceremonies. Provisions for the funeral, temple and domestic rituals are bought from Ooty town. Ooty market has emerged as a focal point to meet most of the demands of Toda. After the *err* is sacrificed, a butcher from Naduvattam, near Gudalur, comes and takes away the carcass. The butcher in most of the cases is a Muslim; he pays the Toda, anywhere between rupees five hundred and above (Pandey 2007:41-42).

The Badaga are agriculturalists. Toda association with the Badaga was based on the supply of food grains. The Toda lived on the grains gifted by other tribes (Francis 1910: 138). They cultivated Korali (*Setaria glauca),* Ragi and Pothm (*Panicum miliar*) which are the Badaga's staple diet (Francis, 1910: 129). An annual contribution of grain known as Gudu was made by the Badaga to the Toda. (Francis 1910: 157; Rivers 1986: 630). The Badaga exchanged milk (*Pors*) products, which they procured from the Toda, with rice from the plains dwellers. The Badaga kept a huge part of the share for them and exchanged the remaining rice for more *Pors* products with the Toda. The institution of *Gudu* has been completely abandoned and is no longer practised by the Badaga. The Badaga no longer cultivate Samai and Ragi. Today, rice, which is procured from the Ooty market, is consumed as staple food by both the communities.

The religious links between the Toda and the Badaga are strong. The Toda used to gift a calf *(koerr)* for the *Heatthe Amman,* sacred temple of the Badaga at Bergani. There are two Toda patricians that are transhuman as they have their sacred temples in the western edges of the Nilgiris. They migrate to the sacred temples and occupy their temporary settlements from December to May. On the onset off the monsoon they return to their permanent settlements. Before returning to their permanent settlements from the temporary settlements Toda visit the Melkarte temple in *Melakundah.* It is a

Shiva temple and the priest of the temple is a Badaga man. The Toda stay overnight and cook food in the premises of the temple. It is the duty of the Badaga priest to look after the Toda and perform the required rituals for them during their stay.

The relationship of Toda with Kota is different when compared to Badaga. Kota are artisans, musicians and smiths (Francis 1910: 157). The Kota supplied material that was used by the Toda for maintaining their religion and livelihood. The Kota provided a number of articles to the Toda which are used in different economic and cultural contexts. For instance, *Adi* (pots) were used for the Toda funeral ceremonies and also for storing *Pors* in the Toda temples. *Mosht* (axes) were used for sacrificing buffaloes *(errs)* and cutting wood for the construction of temples. *Kudvol* (Knifes) were used to cut plants and other things. *Koodi* (baskets) were utilised to keep the belongings of the dead in it and placed on the pyre. *Poidchi* (an iron instrument), more like an axe, but thicker and curved, was used to smoothen wooden planks and prepare wooden poles for building the Toda temples. These implements were also used to prepare buffalo and calf pens.

The Toda refer to the Kurumba as 'Kurb'. They are feared by the Toda as they have the ability to inflict harm on them through black magic. While the Toda live on the plateau, the Kurumba live on a lower elevation. They do not make physical contact often with the Toda.

The Kurumba, in the past, supplied *pothm* to the Toda. The *pothm* was bigger in size, tastier than the ones cultivated by the Badaga in Nilgiris. The Kurumba used to cultivate *pothm*, and other produce like *Thukoli* (a type of peas), and *'Ponievar'* (a bean variety that is black in colour) in the lowlands and supplied them to the Toda. An important place where the Kurumba inhabited is Poni in the Aatpadi valley. The Toda identify the beans by the place it came from. Toda differentiate between the beans produced in the highland and the ones produced by the Kurumba.

In exchange for the goods and services of the Kurumba, Toda gave Indian cigarettes (beedis), jaggery (*kapauti*) and sometimes one rupee (*Udkos*). The Kurumba were overwhelmed by the Toda reciprocity. The Kurumba are considered lower in status than the Toda but not lower than the Kota. The Kurumba, upon visiting the

Toda villages, would stay in the Toda houses. Kurumba used to share food and exchange conversations with the Toda. This is no longer in vogue.

However, Kurumba and Toda continue to share a religious tie. The Toda visit the Kurumba once a year in Poni, a place sacred for both the communities. The Toda believe that their hero, *Kwattein*, who was elevated to the status of God, and Goddess *Teikrzy*, their creator reside in the peaks in Poni. These peaks are considered as Peaks where their Gods reside (*Theothitt*). Toda recognise the peaks as *Kwattein* and *Teikrzy thitt*. The Kurumba refer to the peak as Mallehswar (Chhabra 1996:4). Both the tribes associate themselves with the landscape through their culture and understanding of nature. The Kurumba believe that the peak is the holy abode of the almighty Lord Shiva, while the Toda also believe that their God and Goddess reside in the peaks. On the occasion of *Maha Shivaratri*, every year, both the tribes join together to climb these peaks, to offer their prayers that evening. Kurumba light a holy lamp on the peak (Chhabra 2001). The Toda and Kurumba in Aatpadi valley light lamps in their homes after they see the holy lamp flicker on the peak. A stone shrine with tridents, a symbol of lord Shiva is placed on the summit (Chhabra 1996).

The Toda relationship with the various groups in Nilgiris was based on exchange of resources. Contribution to Toda livelihood systems were made by the Kota, Kurumba and the Badaga. In return the Toda also supported the livelihoods of the other groups. The ritual and livelihood association between the Toda and various groups that existed in the past has since been altered. Today, the Toda do not depend on the Kota for ritual and other articles, which is now purchased from the market. Badaga no longer give 'Gudu' to the Toda. The Kurumba do not supply food items any longer or other religious implements. With the weakening of pastoralism, the Toda now depend on agriculture as a major source of livelihood. The Toda lives on the money earned from leasing their agricultural land to the non-Toda. The Toda buys food grains from Ooty or from the fair price shop under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The other items sold under the PDS are *ravaa*, wheat, pickles, salt, detergents, etc. The quality of PDS rice is very poor and some of the Toda buy rice in large quantities in the Ooty market, instead of the PDS.

The requirements of the Toda in the past were met by the different groups in the Nilgiris. Reciprocity, exchange of goods and services between the indigenous communities has now been replaced by cash economy. The relationship between the groups has become an impersonal one, where the groups no longer associate with each other based on previous systems of exchange.

## II

Traditionally the Toda are a pastoral people. They eke out their livelihood by rearing and tending their two grades of buffalo herds i.e., sacred and domestic. The buffalo herds are grazed on the grasslands of the Nilgiri hills. Buffalo milk (*Pors*) and milk products like butter *(pen)*, butter milk (*mudz*), clarified butter *(Nei)* constitute an important part of their diet. Milk has a dual place in the Toda community. Milk from the domestic buffalo is used for domestic consumption while the sacred buffalo milk is used for complex Toda dairy temple rituals. However, the sacred buffalo milk is made secular by processing the milk into *Nei* for consumption by all or it is sold in the Nilgiris market. The domestic buffalo milk is sold to milk cooperatives in the tourist town of Ooty and close by tea shops. In the past, milk was processed into clarified butter (ghee) and sold.

During the summers, the maximum temperature ranges between 21´ to 25´ C to a minimum of 10´C. In the winters the maximum temperature ranges between 16´C to 21´C and the lowest is 2´C. Given the climatic condition of the Nilgiris, during the 19th century, the British found the Nilgiris an ideal refuge against the sweltering heat of the Indian plains and the subsequent influx of Indian communities into the hills altered the existing social fabric of the Nilgiri hills. Culture contact with the British and Indian people from the plains led to social and cultural change amongst the indigenous communities (Mandelbaum 1941). Due to its pleasant climate, being cold throughout the year, and its panoramic landscapes, people anticipated more business opportunities. The plains people came to the Nilgiris as semi-skilled labour, while other communities like the Marwaris, Sindhis, Parsis, Muslims, Gounders and Chettiars visualised business opportunities in the hills and stayed back. Nilgiris began to develop as a tourist destination.

The British also altered the ecological landscape by introducing exotic variety of trees, plants, vegetables and tea plantations that replaced the indigenous forests known as *Sholas*. This had impact on the Toda landscape, since the grasslands for their buffaloes have decreased. The sacred sites and temples of the Toda were lost.

The culture contact of the Toda with the British led to the acculturation of the Toda towards the religious beliefs and values of Christianity. The British Christian missionaries impacted the I oda culture. The missions managed to convert Todas into Christians. Today there are a sizable number of Christian Todas (Walker 2003). Christianity operates in a different manner in the Toda villages in a few households. A few Toda houses have pictures of Christ, the Cross, a symbol of Christianity, and the Tamil version of the Bible. The believers of Christianity are more among women than men. The men still believe in the traditional Gods and their temples. The women go to the church on Sundays for the Sunday service. When the women go to the church they also take children along with them, who, in turn, are initiated to Christianity from an early age. The women prefer Jesus to other Gods as he is believe to be good, and they like him. The women abandoned wearing the traditional clothes for the Toda ceremonies. A few women refuse to bow on occasions when necessary in the sacred rituals like festivals, death and temple functions (Pandey 2007).

The reason for this development is, as the Missionaries claim, that the women are not treated well by the men folk. They are indoctrinated to believe that a religion where the women are not allowed to participate in the Toda pastoral life or go to the Toda temples is no religion at all, while in the Christian Churches anyone can pray to Jesus. The missionaries come to the villages and pray in the Toda houses and convince them that Christianity is the only way to reach God. The Christian Mission is a strong promoter of Christianity and they discourage women from applying *bindi* (forehead decoration) or the married women from putting *kumkumum* (vermillion) and also wearing ornaments (Pandey 2007; Prasad and Pandey 2008).

During the colonial rule, the pastoral Toda were induced to take up agriculture as a new livelihood. Today most of the Toda own agricultural land and own buffalo herds. While some cultivate, the majority lease their agricultural land to non-Toda who grow vegetables like potatoes, cabbage, beans and carrot. Today, apart from the indigenous population in the District, we find settlers from Kerala, Kanadigas from the state of Karnataka, Bengalis. Marwaris, Sindhis, Parsis, Muslims, Tamilians, Tibetan and Sri Lankan migrants, Nepalese. and other communities. The mushrooming of educational and research institutions, private and public industries, hotels for tourists, an Army cantonment established by the British has led to a diverse profile of communities living in the Nilgiri hills.

## III

## Organisation of the Toda Community

The organization of the Toda community is shaped by the relationship between the two Toda divisions, the clans, their different grade of buffaloes and the complex hierarchy of temples that form the Toda dairy complex. This is another context within which the Toda people may be understood, apart from their traditional relationship with other indigenous communities.

The Toda live in settlements known as *'Mud'*, which is also a term for the clan. However, it is not restricted to the clan and the settlement. It also comprises the temple complex, funeral sites and activities pertaining to the patrician. The Toda identify themselves with the clan and the village that is associated with the clan. Hence, the village is also called *Mud*. The hamlets are spread across the hills and grasslands of Nilgiris. Most of the hamlets are located on the edge of forests and close to water points. Requirement of water for the hamlets and the herds become crucial in locating the hamlets. The huts are shaped in a semi-circle, made with thatch or marsh grass called *Avvul* (*Eriochrysis rangacharii*) and *Kabpul* (*Puyravaud* et al., 2003). The thatch grass was earlier available around the Toda villages and is not eaten by the buffaloes. For the last fifteen to twenty years, they have been travelling sixty kilometres to a place called Korakundah and Upper Bhavani to collect the grass for thatching their huts and temples. The thatch grass has become very rare. Once the temples and huts are built, they last for more than eighty years with periodic re-thatching in between. They are thatched using material procured form the environment like thatch and cane and wooden planks. The cane (*Calamus pseudotenuis*) is also procured from the extreme edges of the Nilgiri plateau (Chabbra 2002). The traditional residential hut structures are replaced by modern houses made by using bricks and Reinforced Concrete Cement (RCC) roofs. However, the temples in their traditional form are still retained.

Each settlement has a Toda and a Tamil name. In Tamil, the Toda settlements are called *'Mund'*. The Toda use the Toda name while referring to the village settlements to another Toda. While talking about the settlements to a non-Toda outsider (*Pyodr*), the Tamil name is used. Toda call their society as '*Jaudi*'. They refer to themselves as '*Aul*' people. The word '*Jaudi*' is very similar to the Sanskrit word 'Jati', used to connote 'caste' in Indian society. A Toda identifies another member of his society as *'Aul Jaudi'*. There are two endogamous divisions, namely *Tordarsh Aul* and *Tevilth Aul*, and one belongs to either by birth. Marriage of members between the two divisions is prohibited. The two part structural division of the Toda plays an important role in organizing the community. Each division plays a significant role in the functioning of the Toda community. Without either of the divisions the functioning of Toda community is hindered.

The Tordarsh people consider the Tevilth people ritually lower in status. Both the divisions have a common name to address each other. The term '*Sauthy*' is very commonly used to refer to the '*Aul*' of the opposite division. The referring division is the '*Seemi*' and the division referred to is '*Sauthy*'. The term *Sauthy* has functional significance. It is the responsibility of the *Sauthy* to execute the work pertaining to festivals, marriages and death rituals for the *Seemi*. It is the sacred task of the *Sauthy* to ensure performance of rituals, which, in turn, ensures smooth functioning of the Toda community. The concept of *Sauthy* and *Seemi* is very fluid as one of the divisions has to occupy a status by performing a prescribed role. The *Sauthy* and *Seemi* have fixed roles which, they have to perform.

The Toda have a mythical legend that explains the origin of these two divisions. According to their legend, thousand of years ago during the period of Kwattein (a legendry Toda hero) both the divisions lived as only Tordarsh, and no distinction existed between them. A death occurred in one of the villages and the people belonging to that village observed mourning, while in another village, unaware of this death, the Toda, in their usual jovial mood, were rejoicing, singing and dancing. The act of one village people mourning whilst another celebrating drew the attention of Kwattein. He got deeply interested in the behaviour of the Toda people. He noted this behaviour to be very unique. He summoned all the clan members and pronounced that the kin of the deceased clan would not carry out any of the death rituals. It becomes the responsibility of the kin of the rejoicing members to perform the death rites of the deceased. It was this incident that divided the Toda into two divisions, the Tordarsh and Tevilth. The kin member of the deceased was called Tordarsh, while the kin members of the rejoicing group were associated with the Tevilth. It is disrespectful for either of the two divisions referring to each other by their names, i.e., Tordarsh and Tevilth. Mentioning of these two names is avoided by the Toda. If a Toda or a non-Toda (*Pyodar*) identifies a Toda by his division, it may not be liked and it may invite conflict. The reference creates opportunity for tension and a cleavage between both the division members. The undercurrent of conflict can be observed during ritual ceremonies and social gatherings. This difference between both the divisions is more evident in the younger generation of Toda.

The two divisions are further divided into exogamous patricians. The Tordarsh division comprises ten exogamous patricians and the Tevilth division comprises five exogamous patricians. The Tordarsh division patricians are *Kars, Meor, Nors, Thorore, Melgars, Kerore, Karare, Inkithi, Pirgore* and *Nirrie.* The Tevilth division patricians are *Omgarsh, Thevak, Kiwore, Mothkare* and *Kiwut.* The divisions are endogamous while the patricians are exogamous. Every Toda belongs to one of the clans that are patrilineal from which the Toda traces his lineage. Simultaneously, the Toda trace their lineage through their matrilineal line (Polyaul) for the purpose of marriage. The clan is not merely a social unit; It Is also associated with the religious rituals and the economic institutions.

## IV

### Seeking Bride for the Groom (*Pirsith*)

The 'Pirsith' is a grand ceremony for a man and a woman. It gives the first experience for a man who is socially accepted as the father of the unborn child. *Pirsith* is the only ritual which pronounces the legal father of the child to-be born socially.

A man's wife to-be is already decided when he is very young. *Nichyam*, confirming the alliance is done by the elderly members from both the families. The boy's parents informally select a date for visiting the girl's parents. The date is decided when both meet somewhere in the Ooty market. On the decided day and date, the boy, his father and few other clan members arrive at the girl's house. The *nichyam* is not a very elaborate ceremony. On arrival, the elders from the boy's side explain the purpose of their visit. Usually, women from the boy's family do not accompany the men to the girl's house. The acceptance of the pair is marked by touching the feet to receive blessings *(Kaul Kothie)*. The 'couple to be' prostrate in front of their elders from both the families. Their heads face downwards, while the elder men lift their left toe and place it on the head of the couple one after the other.

After the celebration is over the boy's side leave the girl's '*mud*' (village). The boy and girl are now tied in a ritual knot and the alliance can be terminated or broken by either the boy or the girl. This can be done only until the *Pirsith* (Bow and Arrow) ceremony take place. Once *Pirsith* is given to a girl and she accepts it, walking out of the relationship is difficult. The traditional council (*noyam*) deals with cases of divorce and other disputes. However, divorces are rare in Toda society. The Tozmokh (wife) is brought to her to-be husband's house after she attains puberty. The boy can bring the Tozmokh home, whenever he thinks convenient after she has attained the age of puberty. The Tozmokh starts visiting and staying in the to-be husband's house after the age of thirteen. The Tozmokh would have shuttled between her and her husband's house several times before *Pirsith*.

The Tozmokh is taken to each household to meet the other members. Often, all the village folk congregate in the groom's house to take a look at the new bride. Men and women, perform the *Odith* (Toda Dance) accompanied by Toda songs (*Nagisth*). The Odith and Nagisth are performed together during happy occasions. The Toda add flavour to the celebration by singing a few non-Toda songs and even perform Badaga dances.

The relationship between a man and a woman before the *Pirsith* ceremony is like a live-in relationship. The Toda give a social consent for a man and a woman to live together. By doing so, the relationship attains a legal status in Toda community. The couple living together enjoy a lot of freedom as the relationship between them is flexible. They visit Ooty town, watch a movie together, eat in a restaurant together and spend time. In some cases the men present gifts to their partner.

The relationship is enjoyed till it lasts. Love relationships are common amongst young Toda. A young Toda man takes pleasure in talking about his love life to his friends. Not all live- in relationships survive to experience the *Pirsith* ceremony. They break in between. A man when unhappy with the woman he has been staying with can leave her. The woman has the same choice. After the marriage, a man can leave his wife on account of her not working, or on account of behaviour, but cannot divorce her on the grounds of adultery. During the tenure of the live-in relationship, a man can take away another man's partner. This can happen when a woman is willing to leave her partner for another man. When a man takes another man's partner he does so by giving a gift. The gift is decided by the *noyam*, and in most of the cases the gift is a prescribed number of buffaloes.

### Marriage: Giving the Pirsith and Becoming Father

Traditionally, the Toda have been a polyandorous community and practised female infanticide, an institution responsible for the low population among the Toda (Marshall 1873). Polyandry has been replaced by monogamy, and now-a-days infanticide is no longer practised. The whole series of cultural events pertaining to marriage is called '*Pirsith Paan*'. The Pirsith is a strict institution with rules and taboos which dictate the conduct in Toda society. The two divisions, i.e., Tordarsh and Tevilth are endogamous units. Neither of the two divisions can be bride givers or receivers. It is taboo to marry women from the opposite division. There have been deviant cases to this norm. It is regarded as a sin to bring a Sauthy woman as a bride. An act of marrying women from the opposite division brings social sanction upon the wrong-doer. The couple is asked to abandon living in the village. They are thrown out of the Toda society. The couple should not maintain or seek any kind of fellowship with their kin members thereafter. The couple is debarred from attending any rituals, temple ceremonies and events related to Toda society.

Every Toda traces his lineage to a *Polyaul*, matrilineal line for the purpose of marriage. For an alliance to be considered, the matrilineal line of the man is most important. The children receive the *polyaul* from their mother. The *polyaul* is passed from one generation to another through the female line. The *polyaul* is an institution where children trace their lineage to the mother's lineage. It is the regulator of marriage alliances. *Polyaul* is a factor that decides permissible marriage. *Polyaul* acts as a taboo mechanism. It functions on the principle of *Polyaul* exogamy. In this a male and female belonging to a similar *Polyaul* cannot seek an alliance with each other. The man and woman have to belong to different *Polyaul*. Marriage within the same *Polyaul*, the Toda believe, brings ill luck. It is considered a presage of evil for the household. The consequences of such marriages can be ruinous. The mother runs the risk of dying while delivering a child. The children born to parents belonging to the same *Polyaul* are believed to bring bad luck, have poor health or born with physical disabilities.

## Giving the Pirsith (Bow and Arrow)

The marriage or "bow and arrow ceremony" is called *Pirsith*. It is called so because the bow and arrow is made using a plant called *Pirsith mayne*, which is given by the bridegroom to-be to the *Tozmokh* during the marriage ceremony. The symbol relates to an Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The Pandavas[2], the protagonists of the epic, fought battles using bow and arrows. When the woman becomes pregnant, one of the brothers or kin members presents the bow and arrow to the woman. Prior to this, the relationship between a man and a woman was regarded as different. Once the bow and arrow is accepted by the pregnant woman, the *Pirsith* giver becomes the symbolic father of the child. The *Pirsith* giver agrees to take up responsibility of taking care of the child.

The *Pirsith* can be given to a woman in her third, fifth or seventh month of pregnancy. The date of the *Pirsith* ceremony is fixed by the *mud aid* (clan people). The clan members dress up well in clean clothes, as it is an important function. The meeting is held in the bridegroom's (*Pirsith* giver's) parent's house as they follow a patrilocal residence pattern. The couple stay in the bridegroom's parent's house until the *Pirsith* ceremony. After which, they may decide to follow a virilocal residence pattern, staying separate from their parents.

## V

### Pastoralism and Buffalo Herding

Toda own water buffaloes. The Toda buffalo is well adapted to the cold climate of the Nilgiris. They are hardy animals. They graze on the grasslands of the Nilgiri hills. The buffalo herds are not tethered. The Toda call their buffalo '*Err*'. This type of buffalo is found only in the Nilgiri highlands and they have been categorised under the species called the Asian Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) (Walker 1986). The Toda do not make special efforts in providing fodder to their buffaloes and do not stall-feed them. The Toda is primarily concerned with the female species of the buffalo. The male buffaloes, called *theierr*, are necessary for the purpose of reproduction, but they do not have any cultural significance in Toda life. When we talk about the Toda *err* we would be referring to the she-buffaloes. The Toda categorise she-buffaloes into two categories *Postherr* (temple buffalo) and *Putherr* (domestic buffalo).

The Toda consider err as an intelligent animal which can recognise the voice of its master. Each *err* is given a name. A few names of *Putherr* are *Sinmorsh, Narouz, Tillimorsh,* and *Seetmorsh*. The names of a few *Postherr* are *Nerove, Karzme,* and *Aurzoom*. The names of Putherr are kept after flowers and gold. For example, in *Sin Marsh, Sin* means gold and *morsh* means flower. Naming the buffalo helps the Toda to identify and mobilise the herd when they are grazing. The Toda identifies each buffalo by its facial feature and shape. He does not confuse one buffalo with another. When the Toda calls the name of one of the buffaloes, it usually happens that only that particular buffalo with the name responds.

Each stage of growth of *err* is identified by the Toda. The stages of growth are demarcated from the previous stage based on certain physical features and inculcation of certain traits like change in feeding habits. When the calf is born it is called a *Koerr*. This is the period it feeds on its mother's *Pors*. It is very playful and naughty. It is very difficult to control the *Koerr*. It becomes necessary for the Toda to exercise care in handling the *Koerr*. It is from the beginning that it is brought under vigilance; otherwise it would be very difficult for the Toda to control the *Koerr* when it grows. When the *Koerr* is new born, the mother is allowed to stay near it for two to three days, after which the calf is pushed into a pen after it has suckled its mother. The bond between the mother and its calf is so strong that the mother continues to stray around the *Koerr*'s pen, not going to graze. When the calf becomes a month old it is allowed to roam around its mother in the vicinity of the village during the morning and evening. This is the time when the mother is milked and the milking begins only after the *Koerr* has suckled its mother. It is around this time that the *Koerr* begins feeding on a few strands of grass.

When the *Koerr* is five months old, horns would have begun appearing on its head. This stage is very significant, as it stops feeding on milk and being dependent on its mother. It begins feeding on grass which becomes its regular diet. At this stage, it is identified as a *Polh*. The *Polh* grows in size, it becomes sturdier and the horns begin to grow longer and it begins to learn the way of life of an *err*. The *Polh* can be seen indulging in all sorts of play with its other age mates. It takes three to four years for a *Polh* to develop into a full grown *err*.

Management of *errs* is an integral part of pastoral livelihoods. The activities relating to the management of *err* by Toda men and women are clearly defined. When it comes to the day to day management of *errs*, the rules as part of their culture do not make a distinction between the *Postherr* and *Putherr*. It is in the context of temple rituals that both the grade of buffaloes are differentiated. Getting *err* to graze seems a simple task for the Toda. After milking, which the men only undertake, *errs* are left to graze. The buffaloes are left to graze all day long. Most of the time, no one supervises grazing buffaloes. In a few cases, a boy or an adult man accompanies the herd to keep vigil. When the herd leaves in the morning to graze, the Toda observes where the herd is heading. If the herd leaves for the higher side from the village, it is assumed that the herd must be grazing some where in the higher elevations. If the herd leaves towards the slope downwards, it means that the herd has been grazing in the lower elevations. Making a note of the movement of the herd helps the Toda to arrive at the location as to where the herd has been grazing at dusk.

A Toda man, with precision can identify his herd of *errs* at a distance of five hundred metres. He would not confuse his herd with another's herd. The Toda calls out to his herd by saying 'graze, it is me' meaning that your master has arrived. When the Toda wants the herd to return, he calls out one or two names amongst the herd. *Errs* respond to his call by looking at him. He then signifies in the Toda language that it is time to return. If necessary he begins driving the herd back with his walking stick called *Petkuearsh*.

Once, the herd starts moving in the direction of home, he walks back home confidently, knowing that the herd would return home. Each Toda develops a methodology of *err* management. The herds are free wanderers and dislike any type of chains or being tied or even stall feeding. Once the herd arrives home, they are ready to be milked. The *Koerr* are let out of their sheds to suckle its mother. The calf suckles for some time till it has had its share of *Pors*. It is then hit on its back, horns or on its forehead and is forcefully moved away so that the Toda can milk. A boy, man or in some cases a woman stand with a *Petkuearsh* to monitor the movements of the *Koerr*, when the process of milking begins.

The *Pors* (milk) is processed into other dairy products like *Pen*, *Mudz* and *nei*. Churning is done by hands using a churning stick (*Mudda*) made by the Toda. Milking, churning and processing are the job specialisation of men (Francis 1910: 140; Walker 1986; 50. 52). However there are households where women do the churning on a regular basis. However, no case of women milking *errs* was observed.

The sacred and the domestic *errs* have a common place for habitation, and a common pen. When it comes to protection of the *Koerr* from predators and extreme temperatures of the Nilgiris, both the categories of calves are put together in one shed. They are made to move out together to graze. The *Postherr* is treated with greater respect only during the special temple ceremonies. Their milk is processed in their associated temple dairies by the priest. During the non-festivity period, the temple *errs* are not milked. The *Pors* is left for the *Koerr* to consume. If the *Koerr* is a female it is more important to the Toda and is sacred by virtue of it being born to a

*Postherr.* The calf is nurtured well and is allowed to suckle its mother.

## VI

### Temple Complex

There is a sacred hierarchy of *Tordarsh* temples. The status of the temple is determined by the sacred significance of the temples, sacred sites and associated grade of temple buffaloes attached to the temple. The extensive ritual practises related to the dairy complexes, purity of the priest and the sacred location of the temple and the sacred buffaloes associated with the temples determine the status of the temple. The temples may be categorised for our purpose of understanding into three levels: 1) primary, 2) secondary, and 3) tertiary. The highest grade of sacredness is attached to the primary temple followed by the secondary and tertiary. It is significant that no temple hierarchy among the *Tevilth* division exists.

At the primary level are the two conical temples called as *Pows.* These two temples are in the shape of cones, unlike the semi-circular temples called *Polyars* which are found in many village. One *Pow is* located in *Kimud* (in Tamil Muthunadmund) village belonging to *Nors* clan and called as *Nors Pow,* and another in *Karare* (in Tamil Bikapatthimund) village belonging to *Karare* clan and is known as *Konos Pow.* The conical temple in *Karare* village is very important for the *Karare* clan and only their clans-men can become priests in this temple. The *Kimud* conical temple is regarded as sacred and ritually important by all the Toda. In the Nors Pow temple only the Melgars clan people or the Tevilth division members can assume the priestly office.

The secondary level temples are the *mud* (clan) temples called *Uroli.* These are of high significance as they are the sole representatives of the clan. The priest is called *Uraul* (the person at the *Uroli)* who looks after the rituals and functioning of the temple. Since *Melgars mud* does not have a secondary level temple they do not require an *Uraul.* Each village of a patrician comes under a 'head village' where the head temples of the clans are located. The head village would have the head temple under which all the village temples are a part.

*Melgars* clan is an exception to this as they do not have any head temple. The appointment of a priest for the secondary level temples or the head temples in the head villages is a matter of rule, and not of choice. The first offer to become a priest in the *Tordarsh* division temples is made to the *Melgars aul* (clan people) of *Tordarsh*. If they decline, then the opposite clan members are requested to become priests. The *Melgars* people have been declining from becoming priests in the Tordarsh clan temples. The reason which was conveyed was that they were not willing, as they do not want to become priests. The Tordarsh division members have been requesting the Tevilth division people to become priests in their temples.

The head village would have two temples: one, its own village temple and the other, the head temple of the whole patrician. For instance, the *Kars* clan of the *Tordarsh* division has ten villages. Out of these ten villages, one of the villages, *Iskiti* (Tamizagam Mund), is the head village of the *Kars* clan. This village also has the head temple of the *Kars* clan. Similarly, the other clans have a head village where the head temple of the clan is present. It must be noted here that in some cases the villages may not have a temple at the village level, but it does trace its alliance with the head temple.

The tertiary level temples (*Polyars)* are village temples known as *Thorrohli*. The Tordarsh division clans have many villages, *muds*. The priest for the *Polyars* is a man usually from the same clan but could be from the same village or from another village or clan. The priest when he takes charge of performing the rituals connected to the *Polyars* is known as the *'Pollhikarth Pol'*. He has duties to perform pertaining to the village temple like milking the *Postherr* or the *errs* from the specific category of 'sacred type' *errs* and performing rituals linked with the particular temple. Each grade of temple has a buffalo grade associated with it. The particular grades of buffaloes are required for opening the temple to carry out its rituals. The types of sacred buffaloes are '*Uroli err*, '*Morth err Penap err*', *'Noshepep err'* and *Koggoli err*', can be used for milking and ceremonial purposes. They cannot mix one type of buffalo's milk with another type. For instance. *Nosh* clan can use *Noshepep err* milk for the *Nors Pow* temple. While the Uroli err's milk is used for the Uroli temple. They cannot use the milk of another category of buffalo say *Penap err* or *Morth err*.

These three levels of temples are significant to the Tordarsh and Tevilth division of the Toda and they have different levels of their relevance. The priests for the first two levels of temples are from *Tevilth* division of the Toda and the last category *Thorrohli* has only *Tordarsh* from the same *mud* as priests.

The *Tevilth aul* do not have multiple, hierarchical temple structures. The *Tevilth* have only village level temples and their priests are all from *Tevilth* only. They only have the village temples, *Polyars,* which are their highest grade of temples. In the *Tevilth* division temples only the *Tevilth* people can become priests. They cannot call upon the *Tordarsh* division people to become priests in their temples. When the Tordarsh clan people call the Tevilth people to become priests in their temples, they have to oblige, as it is their duty.

## VII

## Changing World of the Toda

The Toda, perhaps, were one of the first tribes to be exposed to modernity and change. The British were the prominent agents of change in the Nilgiris. The impact of change on the Toda may be traced back to the British period. The British idea of growth, modernization and development had a far reaching impact on the Toda. The British establishment in the Nilgiris was done at the cost of depriving the Toda their traditional ownership of their land by declaring Toda grasslands as 'Government lands'. The British converted pastures into tea plantations, vegetable cultivation, indigenous forests (*Sholas*) were replaced by exotic species i.e., wattle, eucalyptus and pine as the dominant species. The Toda sacred places were replaced by exotic forests breaking their link with the sacred rituals. The growing number of hydro-electric plants has led to a decline in pasture. These factors led to a depletion of grasslands and resource for the Toda buffalo. In three places in the Nilgiris, there has been a decrease of 100% in 1992 since 1849. On the whole there has been a 50% decrease in grasslands between 1849 and 1992 (Kumar 1993). Hence, causing a decline in number of buffaloes; pastoralism as a livelihood has reduced. Many Toda temples are not functional as there is a shortage of temple buffaloes, and even if there are, they do not produce milk during the season of temple rituals.

The British have been instrumental in introducing agriculture to the Toda. The British perceived pastoralism as an inferior way of eking out a livelihood. They thought agriculture was a more civilized way of making a living. With these perceptions and their efforts, they were successful in making the first agriculturalists amongst the Todas. After India's Independence, the Indian administration further continued the British policy and aimed at introducing more Toda to agriculture. Today more and more Toda are adopting agriculture. But they have not abandoned pastoralism altogether. Agriculture has become the primary source of income for the Toda; pastoralism is a secondary source and complements the primary source of income. There are Toda families that do not own any buffaloes; agriculture is their only source of livelihood.

The pastoral Toda have largely transformed into agriculturists. However, one can still observe their dependence on *errs* and their significance in their daily lives is still conspicuous. The colonial administration began inducing the Toda to take up agriculture as a new livelihood. Toda whose livelihood and culture revolves around their buffalo herds resisted in the beginning to adopt agriculture. Many efforts were made by British and the Indian administration but all in vain. However, despite many efforts the Toda did take up cultivation. They converted their grasslands into agriculture lands and leased it to non-Toda. Out of the thirty households surveyed, twenty household were dry land and the rest was wet land. More than half of the Toda households leased their land. Land is leased to Tamil, Malyalis and Kanadigas. This has led to emergence of a new economic and social relationship between the Toda and the tenants. Traditionally, the Toda had economic and social relationship with the indigenous communities. The Toda who cultivate by themselves do so on one patch of the land and lease out the rest. The Toda sell their produce in the plains at Mettuplayam, forty kilometres from Ooty, to vegetable merchants. The Toda of the nearby villages together share the expenses of transporting the vegetable by renting a lorry (Pandey 2007). The Toda and the tenants cultivate 'English Vegetable' i.e., potatoes, beans, peas, cauliflower, carrot, radish, cabbage and beet root.

With the interaction of the Toda with the non-Toda, land is gaining importance in Toda life. Rituals related to the agriculture and land has gained significance. During the month of January before the first sowing of the year takes place, the Toda offer a prayer and sacrifice to Munishwara, a Hindu deity. The offerings made are called 'Bhumi Puja'. Flowers, coconuts, plantains and a chicken are offered to Munishwara. A chicken is sacrificed. The stones representing lord Munishwara is washed. *Vibuthi* (sacred ash) and sandal wood powder are smeared on the stone. Then incense sticks are lit, lime and plantains are offered to the deity. The prayer takes place after the land has been tilled. The prayer is done, requesting the Gods to protect the land and give them good harvest. The women folk also come to witness the offering. The chicken is cooked in the fields and consumed. If the Toda does not do the prayer (puja), a Tamil or Kannadiga tenant does the offerings on their behalf in the presence of the Toda (Pandey 2007).

The tenant makes an advance payment to the Toda apart from the lease amount in the beginning of the year. For an acre of wet land, the Toda received Rs 12,000, while dry land fetched Rs 4,000 (value based on year of fieldwork). The advance money is to be repaid when the lease period is over. The Toda incurs expenses for the life-crisis rituals. The Toda keeps taking loan from the tenant to meet the expenses. The outcome is that the Toda remains indebted to the tenant who continues cultivating on the Toda land (Pandey 2007).

The Toda have adopted modern dress patterns along with their traditional pattern. The younger Toda exchange modern dresses as gifts. The women wear saris, while the younger Toda girls dress up in modern dresses. Traditional dress comprising the *Poothkuly* (embroidered cloak) is worn for traditional functions, marriage and death ceremonies. Toda women with their embroidery skills and starting their own Self Help Groups (SHGs) contribute their share of income to the household. Toda women do not enjoy the same status when it comes to pastoral activities, as they are not allowed by Toda men to take care of buffalo herds. Diversifying into embroidery and Self-Help Groups is a source of income.

The traditional huts (*Pullars*) made from thatch grass have paved the way for concrete houses. It is common to see cement houses in Toda villages, today. There are concrete structures designed in the traditional semi-circe style. The government has promoted the construction of these structures by providing financial assistance. There were just six traditional huts among the fourteen study villages. The Toda today is well linked to the world outside. The Toda is not far from the fold of modernity and technological revolution. Owning mobile phones and television has become a common feature among the Toda. It facilitates faster communication between the Toda in different villages to communicate messages about birth, marriage, death and other cultural activities.

The instalation of symbolic representations of Hindu and Christian Gods is common in Toda houses. Photos and pictures of Gods of both the religions are a common sight in most of the Toda households. Men participate in Hindu festivals and visit temples in Ooty. A few Toda have visited Sabrimala, a sacred Hindu shrine in Kerala. A few respondents conveyed that they had been to Lord Venekteshwar's temple in Tirupathi. In one Toda settlement, a Toda man has constructed a shrine for lord Aiyappa. A few women have a stronger faith in Christianity than men, who have faith in their traditional and Hindu Gods. With the spread of Christian religion, the traditional Toda culture is affected and the community is divided on religious lines. There seems to be three religious belief systems co-existing i.e., Toda belief in their own Gods and Goddesses, Hinduism and Christianity. The Toda performs special rites and festivals for the traditional Gods and Goddesses. As mentioned above, Toda are very intricately related to their buffaloes *(errs)* which are linked to the functioning of their temples. The relevance of the sacred buffaloes (*Postherr*) in the culture of Toda is an indicator of their continuing relationship to pastoralism.

The market has emerged as central location for all economic activity. It is the weekly meeting- place for the Toda. Apart from other factors, the emergence of Ooty as the central point for economic activity has resulted in the breakage of the old symbiotic relationship between the Toda, Kurumba, Badaga and the Kota. The relationship between the Toda and the Kurumba continues, but not in the older form as it existed earlier. The communities have become more individualistic with minimum dependence on each other. The Toda depends on his livelihood to procure commodities from the market at Ooty. The younger generation of Todas hardly know members of the other communities and find it difficult to identify another tribal member from the other communities.

The Toda today is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. They are continuing their traditional practices in different forms and are coping with changes that are new. It is not long when the Toda would have completely transformed into a vegetable farmer. The culture of the Toda is closely associated with the natural resource base of the Nilgiris. There is need for ecological restoration in the Nilgiris. Efforts channelled to replenish the natural resources in the Nilgiri highland have to be made. If such efforts are not made, the Toda may not have any resources left to continue their traditional practices.

## NOTES

1. http://nilgiris.nic.in/profile.html accessed on March 30, 2013
2. The Toda consider the Pandavas as one of their principal household deities. The Pandavas followed the institution of fraternal polyandry, wherein all the brothers had a common wife, Draupadi. Like the Pandavas, the Toda too followed the institution of polyandry.

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# The System of Belief Among the Korku, a Central Indian Tribe

The tribal India can be roughly divided into five zones. The *Himalayan* zone covers the areas from Arunachal Pradesh and six other states of the north-east and northern part of the states of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh leading to the Kashmir Valley. The second is *the western zone* covering the state of Rajasthan. Tribes of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu comprise the tribal population of the *southern zone. The Island zone* is constituted by the Andaman and Nikobar group of islands on the east and Lakshadweep and Minicoy group of islands. However, the most important tribal zone is *the Central tribal zone.* It has maximum number of tribal people and is populated by large tribal groups, such as, Gond, Bhil and Santal besides a number of medium and smaller sized groups. This zone extends along the long and nearly continuous stretch of forest-clad hills from Gujarat to West Bengal, and further through north-eastern India to the hill belt of South-East Asia. Throughout this belt in the Indian territory, the tribes form a 'Corridor zone' adjusting themselves to the encroaching civilizations and maintaining the potentialities of *intra* and *inter*-tribal communication over a wide stretch. This is the most important tribal zone as it is the conjunction of the cultures of Northern and peninsular India. The Korku habitat is located in this zone.

The Korku are Mundari-speaking tribe living in association with Dravidian speaking Gond group of tribes on the east, and Indo-Aryan speaking Bhil group of tribes on the west. They are cut off from their mother stock, and basing on their linguistic affinity, they are presumed to have migrated from Chhotanagpur tribal region. The tribe has a long association with the caste Hindus and has found mention in the Puranik literature as Karkotaka Nagas. The Korku area comprises of the adjacent parts of present-day states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. This is a contiguous area comprising of the districts of Chhindwara, Betul, Hoshangabad, Panchmari, Khandwa and parts of Dewas districts of Madhya Pradesh. In Maharashtra state, they are distributed only in the Melghat forest of Amaravati district which is adjacent to the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. The Korku Habitat falls under the Vidarbha and Mahakoshal Janapadas of ancient India.

A large part of the Korku territory consists of the densely wooded hill ranges with valleys traversed by rivers and small streams. The area is mainly drained by rivers Narmada and Tapti and their tributaries flowing west. Narmada takes its rise from Amarkantak, and Tapti originates from the foothills of Satpura ranges and flows west to the Arabian Sea. The rivers and streams traversing the whole length and breadth of the Korku area remain seasonal except Narmada. Even river Tapti remains dry during summer months. However, water is available in the potholes which exists in large numbers along its stretch. Purna, Tawa, Morand, Bhaji, Ganjal, Shipra, Khan are some of the major tributaries of these two rivers. Narmada is the most sacred river of Central India not only for the Korku tribesman but also for other castes and tribes of the area. The bank of the river Narmada is dotted with a number of Hindu pilgrim centres. The ancient trade route connecting north and peninsular India has passed through the Korku territory. The present day national highways as well as railroads traversed the Korku country. Though the ordinary traffic was much impeded by the hilly tracts especially during the rainy season, still the Korku tract used to be frequented by traders and other non-tribals.

The formation of the area is platonic being characterized by excessively hilly nature and great crops of granite rock masses. The soil is clayey and formed out of Vindhian Scraps. Some area is characterized by Mid-Triassic, lower cretaceous Gondowana rocks. The southern parts are also rocky and Upper Carboniferous lower-Triassic in age. On the eastern and central part there are mines rich in minerals. In the Korku tract of Central India, we find long stretches of dense but deciduous forest which are rich in a variety of timber and other useful trees e.g. teak, sulphi, mahua, mango, sendur, tendu etc. Some of these forests are isolated and lie scattered whilst others from compact blocks. These forests were once reputed to be well filled with large variety of games, but now their stock is much reduced. So far as the climate is concerned one comes across a sudden change of temperature as soon as one ascends the Panchmari hills or Melghat areas. This difference in temperature is caused not only due to higher elevation but also for the abundance of forest. Three seasons, rains, winter and summer are distinctly observable in the area. The total rainfall in a year varies from 1237 to 1262 millimeter. The mean annual temperature varies from 24.2° Celsius to 26.1° Celsius.

The Korku are basically agricultural farmers who also depend on the collection of forest products. Nearly fifty percent of the land is under reserved forest, nine percent is private forest. And about forty percent of the land is used for grazing, agricultural waste and cultivation. The cultivation is done in valleys, plains, and moderate slopes. Dykes are constructed to prevent soil erosion and storage of moisture. Leveling is done as far as possible. Minor ups and downs do not bother the farmers. In some areas they used to practise shifting cultivation. This has been restricted following the imposition of ban on such kind of practice. As per the character of the slopes, undulation and soil condition, various types of crops are raised. Riverbeds are also used as far as possible. The dykes are made in areas where there is a steep slope in the manner of terracing. The elevated areas are used for habitation, and the village settlements are always on the higher level than the farm land. This enhances easy drainage of rain water as well as waste water and also facilitates visibility.

The Korku live in association with a number of Gond and Bhil group of tribes. Some of the tribes of the Gond group and Bhil group live with the Korku in multi-ethnic villages. They have economic and social relation through generations. The important tribal groups include Tathia, Pardhi, Mogya, Bhatra Of Bharti and Pardhan. Bhilala, Mankar, Tadvi etc are important Bhil group of tribes living in association with them. The Hindu belonging to different castes also live in the adjacent areas and have come in contact with the Korku tribal. So Korku are in contact situation with other tribal groups as well as the Hindu castes of different orders. The major area was under the Gond rulers and again they were influenced by the Rajput chieftains and developd *jagirdari* system. There were Korku jagirdars having control over specified areas. The Bara Mahadeo or Chaura Baba of Panchmari hills which attract pilgrims from tribal order from large areas and also Hindu castes from neighboring areas were under the management of Korku *jagirdars*. Their contact with the caste Hindus has had an impact on various aspects of their life.

The Korku are known as Korku by other tribes and caste people of the area. They identify themselves also as Korku which mean in their language as men or hill men. Their linguistic affinity suggest that they have migrated from Chhotanagpur area, the homeland of the Munda group of tribes westward and settled at their present location. In the past, there perhaps had a continuous stretch of Munda group of tribes from Chhotanagpur region to Satpura hills which have been incidentally broken due to the northward influx of Gond group of tribes from the south. In physical appearance the Korku differs from other tribal groups living around. They are medium statured, well-built, and have lighter skin color than that of Gonds. Anthropometrically, they fall out distinctly from Gond and Kolam, and in fact, from all other groups of long headed variety in having comparatively high cephalic index. They have high nasal index and scanty body and facial hair.

The Korku are a god-fearing people. The Korku have been regarded as animist following tribal religion. However, the Hindu influence is obvious and they observe several Hindu festivals and rituals and also share the regional tradition. But their etymology is not only confusing but also its doctrines very from place to place. While they are dependent on the unseen powers, they have vague ideas regarding the nature of the supernatural beings and their role in the origin if the world. It may be mentioned here that the Korku normally use the term **Gomaj' for** gods, and **Pethia** is the high priest. **Soso** is the soul which guards the body when man sleeps. The dreams are the activities of the soul for **Soso** sometimes wanders about during the sleep but return back as soon as one wakes up from sleep and finally depart at the time of death.

The spirit of a man is called **'ravan'. Ravan** can never die or be destroyed. It lives in the throat and leaves the body in the night of whenever the person is asleep and goes abroad to feed. The **Soso** guard the body. The **'ravan'** when out of the body looks like a lizard (small), so lizard should never be killed. If the **Soso** also leaves the body then death occurs. Some say that **Ravan** leaves the body at the time death and do not go immediately but set on the roof of the house till the body is taken away for burial. Then the Ravan and Soso jointly go to god and say how many good and bad deeds they have done. If the evil deeds are more, then they are to suffer in the **Narak Kund** (hall) and if the good deeds are more, then they are set free to roam about.

After the observance of Sidoli, the spirit becomes the ancestor who should be worshipped properly, otherwise they will trouble you. They also think that the animals and birds are trees too possess souls. To them as the air can not be seen, so also the souls. The Korku also believe in transmigration of souls is not systematized enough to include the ascending series of forms, normally the trees, birds and human beings. Neither do they possess any clear and coherent idea about the rewards and punshment meted out to the soul after death. They say only that a person may be reborn as an animal or human being depending on the fact as to whether he or she led an evil or good life. Evidently, the fate of the soul after death is tied among the Korku with the concept of mortality.

While the Korku are not unanimous about the relative prominence of their deities, much of the complexity of their pantheon can be removed if the supernatural beings influencing their life are classified into different catégories. What Is to be noted Is their general belief in the Supreme Being who Is commonly called *Bhagwan.* He is the creator and his dwelling place is the house of god of *Bhagwan.* None can go near Bhagwan. He is not a personal deity, but the sees all that they do. Sickness and death are in his hands, but since he has sent the Korku in this world, he cannot be deliberate and his own hands take them out of such situation. The means may be through some drawing or by a tiger, snake, or even through the spirit. The fate is written at the time of the performance of Umulu Puja for the newborn to Bhagwan.

So Korku seldom say 'Bhagwan took my child' but say 'the eaters ate him'. They do not worship Bhagwan, though some do take his name off and on. They equate this Bhagwan with Lord Mahadeo, as he is regarded as favorably disposed towards the world at large. Bhagwan is said to be actuated by motives of sympathy. One of the myths relates that he is touched by the genuine sufferings of the people and occasionally punishes the guilty ones by creating necessary circumstances.

In contrast to Bhagwan the rest of their supernatural beings are regarded as powerful enough to demand the personal loyalty and the correct observance the traditional returns. With the notable exception of a definitely malevolent being called *Kala* or *Kalbhairav* who is persuaded with great difficulty. Their deities (Gomaj or Gomaj ku) are by and large regarded as their tutelary spirits, being invoked by them as and when the occasion demands, but occasionally these protector deities appear as the malevolent being too, particularly when their displesure is incurred as a result of the non-fulfilment of the vows.

It is Bhagwan who has created various Gomaj, Korku gods and idols. He has authority over them but has turned things over into their hands and they obey him. It is believed that god sent the five *Gomaj* to every village. He said 'Go find your own villages'. When it is mornings, stop wherever you are'. That is your village. 'So they obeyed him. There are five Gomaj common to every Korku village. They may be more but these five are found in each village. These are **Muthua Gomoj, Khere Gomoj, Akhadi Gomoj, Maya and Hanuman Gomoj.**

**Muthua Gomoj:** He is the head of the village while setting up of a village one grove is left and the Muthua is enshrined here at the root of the central tree. One neem tree is also planted or a mango tree which finally replaces the grove in course of time. Muthua is worshipped in each festival and ritual, individually as well as on some occasion at communal level. The Bhumika make the offering for the village in *Dasera.* One goat is offered. He is the good old man of the village.

**Kheda Gomoj** is also lord of the village. It is mostly at the root of a peepal tree and consist of a heap of stones. It is worhsipped on the eve of Dasera. During wedding the women come to present the wedding cloth.

**Bajrangbali** or Hanuman Gomoj is the monkey god. It is a crude figure of a monkey chipped out of stone and dabbed by red paint. Saturday is the day of worship. Sweets, flower, coconut etc are ladies to go to Hanuman temple. But they are not that rigid about it. Akhari gomaj is worshipped once in a year by the Korku. The Thatia worship Akhri Gomaj in Dewali.

According to the Korku the sun and the moon are brothers they are gods. The sun is **Diya gomoj** and the moon is *Raoto Gomoj*. The other important *gomoj* in a Korku village is **maya** or Maoku or Mata. She is the goddess of small pox. She is not called gomoj but simply Maya. She is worshipped once in a year. There is anotherr deity, Mata for measeals.

The various deities propitiated by the Korku may be arranged in the following way. A kind of high and low status prevail among the deities. Some are more important while others are relatively less important.

| Sl. No. | Deity | Place | Symbol | Priest | Worshipped For and how |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Chulbu bana | Village Raipur | Unhewen stones | Bhumka | Decease, with date Lemon etc |
| 2. | Goal baba | -do- | -do- | -do- | Cattle decease |
| 3. | Det baba | -do- | -do-. | -do- | Evil spirit trouble women |
| 4. | Meghnathji or Lanka Ravan | -do- | Wooden post & Unhewen stones | -do- | Disease |
| 5. | Bajrangbali | -do- | Stone image | -do- | For better life |
| 6. | Ardali Maya | -do- | Square raised platform with a stone on top of it | -do- | Small pox |
| 7. | Kala Maya & mahadeo | Umun Maya | -do- | -do- | For safety |
| 8. | Umun Maya | -do- | -do- | -do- | Cholera, goat offering, prefer Black goat for sacrifice. |
| 9. | Banjari Maya | -do- | -do- | -do- | -do- |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | Siuara Deo | Raipur | Heap of Unhewen stones | -do- | To protect crop from wild pigs |
| 11. | Bhawara Deo | -do- | -do- | -do- | -do- |
| 12. | Khad Kia Deo | -do- | -do- | -do- | On the eve of Dewali for cattle. |
| 13. | Muthtua Deo | -do- | -do- | -do- | In marriage |
| 14. | Kheda Deo | -do- | -do- | -do- | On dasera for farming. |
| 15. | Panihari Deo | -do- | -do- | -do- | One he goat and a she goat offered. |
| 16. | Bagh deo or Kola Maka | Raipur | -do- | -do- | Of water source to protect cattle from tigers. |

The items of worship include date, lemon, cocount, Kumkum vermillion, camphor, alum, jaggery and ghee. Dhwaja or **Nishan** is there at all the shrines which is changed once in a year during *Dasera* festival. Ritual items offered are **Malida** (baked flour, gnndded and mixed with ghee and jaggery) **Kadai** sweet etc. In some cases goat or hen offering is there. *Kala* is the *kala Bhairau* and goat offering is must for this deity.

Peepal, Baheda, Shimul, Neem and Mango are the favourite trees for the spirits. Meghnath is also referred as Khandara Baba. There are a number of spirits also. If a male child dies before one year of age he becomes Zitinga. The most powerful spirit. He steals things. If he likes to have offering he steals the cattles. The Bhumka tells the specific tree where he stays and offerings are to be made there inorder to get back the cattle. If a boy expires before marriage he becomes '*de baba*'. He cannot get entry to the heaven and become a spirit. Women get possessed by **'det baba' only,** while the men get possessed by **Saitan** or evil spirit. **Det baba** is also evil spirit but his choice are the female as he died being unmarried and remain dissatisfied. If a girl expire a before marriage, she becomes **dakini** another evil spirit. Of all the spirits, Matia is more dangerous as he smashes the limbs of the victim. There is *pir baba* also who they worship too.

There are eleven mothers or female deities. These are as follows.

| Sl.No. | Goddess | How worshipped |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Jalmi Maya or Jalam Maya | Kadari bhandara |
| 2. | Talpi maya | Sheo, Chuda |
| 3. | Ubala Maya | Malida |
| 4. | Eokk Maya | Grass Bangle, vermilion |
| 5. | Silak Maya | Kumkum, alum Codonut |
| 6. | Dakini | One line formed of Kumkum and some coconut of alum kept. |
| 7. | Pokini | Jaggary and roasted gram |
| 8. | Dharti | Sugar |
| 9. | Chittimaye | Brahma Sugar |
| 10. | Ramkhedaye | Sugar |
| 11. | Chakigaye | Sugar |

*Jalni mata* of *Gupu toda* in Bhaisdei tahsil is very famous. His *agauni* in *Kala Bhum* is also quite popular. The above mentioned eleven deities are worshipped on Monday and Tuesday.

Bhujari Maya is worshipped in Dasera with date, lemon and cocunut. Sivara and Bhauara also worshipped during Dasera. Ardali Maya is worshipped in Mah. Animal offering is common. Kala is alwayss worshipped with black goat offering. Khedkia is worshipped in Dewali and Abhadi by the Thatia. Muthua is worshipped on **Dasera** and **Chet** but animal offering is not done. Kheda deo is worshipped during Dasera and she goat is sacrificed in addition to one he goat. During Dasera and Mah **Panihari deo** is worshipped. One black cock and black goat offered. During Dasera all the village deities are worshipped. Kula Deo is alwayss worshipped with goat offering.

A few other deities are also there. The **masanti jujumka** live in the graves of the dead. They move around the graves at night to find food. Women never go to the graveyard for fear of them. The **bhutoku** are the evil spirits who cause sickness, death and possession. They are greatly feared, exorcism is worse and person wildly leaps and shouts. **Gomoj or deo** possession is different. Usually the *parihar* or *Bhagat* get possessed and also some common men. Here it is the spirit of the idol or the god itself that enters the person and gives divine power. The **chidoke or Chido** appear in white form. It may also be in animal form. There is a story that in a village on the bank of river Tapti when the adults were away in the field, one crocodile came and took a child from a swing. The people realized finally that it was **chido.** So the villages shifted to a new site. *Dakini* are female spirits that cause the men who become possessed by them to live and dress as woman. *Boram* is the spirit of a female who has died in cause of child birth. She goes around wailing at night.

*Saitans* are numerous but are outnumbered by the **Bhuts** or **Bhutoka.** Some do not distinguish between them but *Saitans* are more feared. Some believed that *Parihar* can tacke *Bhutoka* but *Saitans* are more dangerous.

When a young men dies in an accident, then for a period he may become a Saitan. *Birku* are the servant of those black magic. They do his bidding, trouble a person, make his sick or cause him death. The Birkus are feared all over the Korku area. There may be male or female practicing black magic.

On the other hand **Gogojiba** though is also a magical but does not cause trouble to others. There may be male or female practicing this. **Gogojiba** may be able to relive the man of his illness. They do it with turmeric and rice and also utter something. All the **Gogojiba** are the follower of *Narsighbaba.* Being troubled by **Gogojiba** people try to find out a more powerful **Gogojiba.** If they not get such a person then they make offering to lord **Narsinghbaba.**

Besides these each house has their *kuldeo* or the god of their lineage. These they keep in a bamboo basket who are worshipped on every rituals and festivals by the head of the house. They do not have a name for that. Then, there is also ancestor worship in which offerings are made to all dead ancestors. This is done by the head of the house again at the *dharan* (central pole of the hut).

For appeasing the various **gomoj** and to get favours there is the important functionary called **Bhumka.** He is the ritual specialist, a very important person in the village. He is one who guards the village and the represents the village or an individual. In **Bhawi Akhadi** and **Desera** the community offerings are made through the **Bhumka.** Major event in a year is **Desera** when **Bhumka** offers goat to **Kheda gomaj** and a chicken to **Muthua.** Again at **Bhawi** he offers puja at

Kheda gomaj. At all weddings or rather the night preceeding the wedding the **Bhumka** present the wedding cloth to the **Kheda gomoj.** He also called to treat the sick and pray for cure. The **Bhumka** or the **Bhagat** as he is referred to by the people and sometime treat the sick. However the village becomes defiled in case someone is affliated by maggots in a wound. Then, the **Pethia** cleanses the village as well as purifies the person affected. **Bhumka** or **Bhagat** gets his remuneration of four kilos of cereals from each house in a year. He is the priest, the person who cures the desease or provide protective measures. He is the traditional doctor.

*Parihar* is basically the medicine man and not the priest. In some villages they also serve as village doctors. They also get possessed by **Gomoj** or **deo** and they cure the people with the help of this **Gomoj.** His treatment is tried before going to a medical doctor in usual cases these medicine men have some knowledge of herbs, and indigenous medicine, but since most diseases are believed to be caused by spirits it is in this capacity that he is sought after. He ties a charm to the leg, arm or throat of one who is ill, blows in the ears and gives medicine. He may advise going to some idol to make offering. The women for themselves as well as for their children go to him for the charms, usually just a matted string around the throat. These they tie twice in a year, once in *chet* and another Dasera (six month interval). The Parihar does not himself receive anything for his services If a goat is sacrificed, the meat will be shared by the whole village. He takes nothing to his house of these offerings. It he takes any portion he loose the **'dharam'** (merit) and become **'lobhi'** or greedy. In many villages the Bhagat or Bhumka also does the job of curing and giving the charms. The **Parihar** does it with the help of his propitiatory god. All the **Parihar,** Bhagat or Bhumka have their own propitiatory deity. They are attached to some or other god in the region. Some to **Mahadeo** or **Guputoda** or some other deities.

Each **Bhagat** once in a year has to go to his propitiating deity or the temple to which he is affiliated. Similar is the case for *Parihar.* They do it in the month of **Akhaji** which involves goat offering. This is called **Nawas.** It falls in the month of **Chet.** It may also be done in **Dasera.** It is known to them as **Tirath.** In **Newas** the **puja** or offering are made by the **Parihar,** or **Bhagat. Tirath** is the pilgrimage to some of the places nearby. They also take other in **Tirath.** Actually if one goes to those *Tirath* (pilgrimage) he always take the services of the **Parihar.** The commoner do not got for obervance of *Nawas*. This they do in *Dasera* month or *Chet* month.

The offices of **Bhumka** or **Parihar** usually follow hereditary line. But it may be discontinued. The most experienced and skilled person is designated as **Bhumka** following the death of the previous one. In a village there may be a group of **Parihar,** but only one **Bhumika** is there in a Korku village. As already mentioned, the **Gogojba** and **Birku** are the black magicians. **Birku** is more dangerous and always do harm. The **Parihar** try to cure the sick caused by **Birku** with the help of his god. He also gives charmed earth to the ladies who have no issues for five years or more after marriage. He ties protective string around her throat to protect the foetus from the evil spirit. **Pen holom nunku** and **supam sesendre minku** are the man called to cure snake bite. They have no connection directly with the spirit world as the **parihars** have. They reduce the effect of the poison by the use of chants of some *mantra* in the ears of the affected person. In case of any snake bite in the village, they shout **'pen jaa, Pa aja'** and these men rush to the spot. It is expected that such person should run to the family of the person bitten by a snake. Similarly, there is a separate man to cure a person having scorpion bite.

There remains **Dholya** (the drummer) and **Pavila** (the flute player) who plays a great role in the Korku life. In some of the festivals they are essential and gets yearly remuneration from each house in the form of cereals. **Ghetia** is another person who distributes the offerings after a *puja* equally to the representatives of all the families in the village. He is assisted by others in this work. In every marriage in the village he gets some amount of cereals (approximately two kilos) and some money which varies from village to village.

Pilgrimage is important for them. The **Bhagat** and **Parihar** go to the temple of the god they are affiliated to in the month of Chet and make offering. The commoners also go on pilgrimage under the guidance of **Parihar,** or independently. They sometime take the vow in the name of some gods and visit the shrine after fulfillment of the vow and make offerings. They go to a number of temples some of which are of local importance while others are of regional importance. A list of deities is given below.

| Deity | Place | Nature of things offered |
|---|---|---|
| Narsingh baba | Near butida village | White or red goat |
| Daurebaba | Dolaram | -do- |
| Guputoda Mahadeo and Keladeo | Betul | Keladeo-black goat |
| Baizatdevi | | |
| Baizatdevi | Chekhaldara | White the goat or she goat |
| Belu Deo | Raipur | White the goat or she goat |
| Chikhlam baba | -do- | -do- |
| Chumria baba | Near village Koelary | -do- |
| Aki Baba | Near village Aki | -do- |
| Choutha Gogra | Near village choutha | -do- |
| Kalbita | Near Malur on the north bank of river Tapti one black house is there | -do- |
| Uddum Maye | In the course of river Tapti | -do- |
| Kalbit | In Khedlia Tehsil of Khandwa distt. | -do- |

Besides they also go on pilgrimage to places of regional importance.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ambadevi or Amba mata | Amravati | No animal sacrifice |
| Mahadeo (Chhote) | Bhupal | -do- |
| Mata | Salkanpur | -do- |
| Jalmi Mata | Chikhaldera | on Akhaji |
| Bada Mahado | Pachmari | on Shivratri the Korku goes to the temple of Chaurababa and Mahadecaves on Pilgrimage |
| Chothoye | Betul | on Shivratri |

In a **Nawas** everybody in the village is invited. All do not come, but they are to be invited. The first thing is **Ghar ujal karna** which is done in the night. Chicken is offered at the *Dharan,* Coconut date and lemon offered, and camphor sticks burnt. Then Mathua, Meghnath, mata are worshipped and at each place puja is offered. The ancestors are also worshipped. The Tathia are also invited who do not come. All the family members go to **Dolera.** Goat offering is a must. After **puja** they prepare their meal near a small well. Halwa and meat is prepared and all take their meal. People sing devotional songs. In the evening all come back to the village. When a **Parihar** goes he is styled as possessed and dance wherever they halt in the night. After coming back the Parihar dances for the whole night. Cohabitation is prohibited during the period.

The Korku differentiate dark half and bright by calling **anthad pak** and **ju naiya pak.** They tell about the festival time. They also have the term for numerals from one to ten.

Mia-One
Beri-Two
Aphaia-Three
Upinya-Four
Monaya-Five
Tureya-Six
Aiya-Seven
Elaira-Eight
Araya-Nine
Gelja-Ten.

For the numberals beyond ten they use Hindi numbers.

The Korku months follow lunar system and are reckoned from new moon to new moon. Beginning with *Amavasya* or the new moon, it continues to the day before next new moon. The next new moon is the beginning of the next month. Korku monts are named after the festival that fall at that new moon. In the months that have no new moon festival, the Hindu name of the month is in use. **Bhauri** is the new year festival for the Korku. The following is the list of korku months.

| **Sl.No.** | **Korku** | **English** | **Hindi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Rondo Bharui or Bhouri | June | Jeth |
| 2. | Cikkel Bhuri or Akhadi | July | Asarh |
| 3. | Jiroti | August | Sevan |
| 4 | Pola | September | Bhadon |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | Dasera | October | Kuar |
| 6. | Dewali | November | Kartik |
| 7. | Aghan | December | Aghan |
| 8. | Pus | January | Pus |
| 9. | Ma | February | Mah |
| 10. | Holi or Phagan | March | Phagun |
| 11. | Chet | April | Chait |
| 12. | Akhaji A | May | Bisakh |

The local calendar is based on lunar system. Other people follow **Vikram Samvet.**

Bhawai, Jiroti, Pola and Phagan are four sisters. Bhawai is a widow, so that the festival is only for a day. Various public ceremonies are regularly held in course of the year. Besides, ritualistic, activities are also performed purely for personal reasons.

The Korku calendar of festival starts with Bhawai. It is very much concerned with their farm activities. Only after this they start their intensive work in the farms. The **Pujan** of **Khedadeo** is performed in the village on (**Panchayati Puja**) basis by **Bhumka.** It is the worship or seeking blessing on all the agricultural implements. Fagun to Bhawai is the marriage season. After Bhawi the marriage season comes to an end. The boys bring seven kinds of seeds in a basket and a long green stick. A small ditch is dug, the seeds are planted and the boys use the sticks to enact the whole ploughing, planting and the other processes of cultivation. After this the sticks are placed at the place of worship in the house, i.e. *Dharan* and the *Pujan* is performed in the house by the head of the family. Ritual food items prepared are offered there. In the evening the children go from house to house begging grain flour for their feast the next day. The Panchayati (community) Pujan is done at the *Panihari deo* near the village well or water hole. A day earlier some quantity of chili powder, a kilogram of flour, and twenty five paisa is collected from each house in the village by the Chaudhury.

Since morning all observe fast except the infants. About eleven in the morning the **Patel, Bhagat** and adult male members go to the Panihar deo. Ladies and children do not go. **Bhagat** performs the **Puja** sitting faling east with date, lemon, coconut, vermilion and camphor. One white hen and a multicolored hen **(satballi)** are offered. Then they start cooking, and share their food equally. After these they all go back to their house and make offering at Dharan and tie bamboo stick to it *charat* (bamboo rope). The special food is **sewenj** (made of wheat flour and jaggary). They do not prepare the normal diet. The girls and boys take out a procession with **Bhawi deo** (pot filled up with water). Only unmarried girls participate, this is symbolic for the good rain. On the second day, the kids arrange their feast near **Paniharideo.** First they worship **Paniharideo.** They then prepare the food and eat. After worship they sometimes enact the coming of bride and the groom and the successful marriage ceremony. Sometimes the adults supply the drum and flutes for the wedding (mock) dances. The drum and flutes are played for the weding (mock) dances. In the successive days if there be no rain, the kids mainly the girls, worhsip local employed in Bhawi. Sometimes they are engaged in **Fagun,** and then the term ends in the next **Fagun.** The Korku observe **Bidri** in the month of **Asad.** In this **panchayati pujan** is offered to Muthua. From this day the sowing starts which is again related to forming. **Bhagat** apease **sanjradeo.** After the **puja** a handful of Kutki is brought ceremonially. After this several leaf packets are made containing the grain seeds. Then he hands over one packet to every head of the house. This packet is tied to the basket used for sowing. After distribution of the packets the **Bhumka** opens is eyes. **Akhadi** is observed by the full moon day of **Asad** by the **Tathia.** The Tathia are cattle keeper of Korku. The Tathia worship the Goal Gomaj (good for the cattle) with date, lemon, coconut etc. they start playing their flute (pawi) from this day and play this intermittently till Dewali when again they worship Goal Gomoj. They do not go for work and feed salt to cow and bullocks. Each household subscribes some amount, out of which a goat is purchased. It is sacrificed to the Gomaj and then cooked there. This is then distributed among the villagers. Those who take part in making the offering enjoy it. They do not prepare any other festival specific item. It is a festival observed specially by the Tathia in which their patron the Korku also participate.

Jiroti is a two day festival. It is observed on the **Amavays** (new moon) day in the month of **Sravan.** It is one of the most important festivals observed by the Korku. A day earlier, the village panch meeting is held presided by the **Patel** and under his instruction the

**Chaudhury** makes announcement thet the next day will be celebrated as Jiroti and the day after next will be day of dance and merrymaking. Since Bhawi for the last two months they were busy in the farm activities and so tired of routine work. Hence they take leave from their strenuous work for two days. The women prepare the festive food items and clean the house. They apply fresh coat of cowdung to their houses to give a better look and wash their cloths. On the Jiroti day the cattle herders (Tathia) feed the cattle with some native medicine prepared out of a root called **Kochore** mixed with wild onion and some other kind of wild leaves. The mixture is then mixted with dried mahua flower, butter and salt. Then these are grinded and fed to cattles. The **Kota Puja** is performed by the head of the household. It is tone inside the **Kotha** (cattle shed) with camphor, date, lemon, coconut etc. *Malida* is the food item prepared for offering. It is prepared out of jaggery, ghee, oil and baked flour. In the afternoon, ancestral worship is performed at the **Dharan** by the family head again. Rice and pulses were among the offerings. **'Dal'** means any vegetables prepared. Even mutton curry is called 'dal'. Food items like dal, puri, rice and sometimes mutton is also prepared. After night made members gather around Muthua and in the beats of Dholya (drummer) and Pavila (flute player) they start dancing. The dance continues for the whole night. They also sing songs while dancing, and just after women and girls gather near the **Mutua.** The **Doholya** and **Pavila** also reach. This time only the girls dance in the beats. Simultaneously the boys dance **'Danda'.** They dance at a little distance from the girl's group. Both the dance continues for about two hours and them all return to their houses. From *Jirot* the *Hindoa* (rope swing) is fixed in which the girl, particularly unmarried girls swing and sing the special swing songs. They do it till **pola** festival. They are songs when fixing the swing and also when it is to be removed.

On the fifth day after **Jirot** the **Nag panchami** is observed. This is a daylong festival to worship the snake god. They search out an ant hill in their field, but if there is none in their field, then any and hill will do. The cobra is supposed to dwell there. In the morning the head of the house make the offering at the place of ( ) **'Bamitha' (nagdeo).** Cow milk coconut, vermilion, date, ground nut, camphor stick etc are the ingredients used in the offering. Some make cock sacrifice. On this day, the iron hot plate for preparing rolled bread is not used. It is believed that *Tawa* (hot plate) is the *fauno* (hood) of snake god so he should not be tortured on this day by heating it. They do not prepare *dal* (pulses) as these are the dyes of snake god. They suspend all work in their farms. In the evening the girls dance near the Muthua. The youths from a separate group and dance **Danda.** Net day the **Bhujolia** is sown in leaf cup in some areas. *Shrawan* is observed on *Rakhi poonam* day. They invite their sister and daughters specially as it is their festival. Shrawan is not popular in traditional villages. They observe fast (take fruits sweets tea etc) and do not take principal meal. The Bhujolia (seeds sown in the left cup germinate and the plants become three to four inches high) is worshipped by the sister/daughter with camphor, ghee, coconut. date lemon etc. They tie *Rakhi* to all except their real brother. *Rakhi* is also presented to the gods. Next day is Bhujolia, the ladies carry the Bhujolia in the afternoon and reach the place of Mata. There they take round the Mata's place thrice in a row while singing songs of the festival. The Bhumika make offering to Mata first and then to Muthua.

At Muthua the girls also go round and then they go to the nearby stream or river. There they make offerings and it is observed by the Korku only. The Bhumka does it facing east. The ladies then immerse their Bhujolia and then embrace each other out of pleasure and joy.

After a fortnight comes the great festival of *pola* (bullock festival). The *kumhar* (potter) supplies a pair of earthen bullocks to each household. It is celebrated after a month from Jiroti, like other festivals at meeting of the *pach*, and the Chaudhury announces the festival. It is a three-day long ceremony.

*Khand Mud:* this is the first day of the festival. As a common practice, if there be any death on the day of a particular festival, the festival is not observed by the family members of the deceased till male child takes birth in the ill fated family on the same date. This is true for all the festivals. On the first day, they bring the root of *palasia* tree and prepare decorative string for their bullocks. The bullocks are fed with wild roots and tubers as medicine which is also done in Jiroti festival. The cattle are essential for farm works, so they are to be kept in proper health. The Chaudhury makes a rope of *Palsia* root and tie it in the form of gate (*Toran*) on the east of Muthua at the village entry. He gets some quantity of cereals from each household in the village for this. The black-smith fixes nails at the door and cots in each house. This is particularly observed in the areas where Korku live with other castes and tribes. The backsmith also do it in Jiroti to protect the family from evil spirit.

The next day is *Pola.* The kids play with wooden or earthen bullocks. The head of the household observe *Brat* and fast. In the afternoon they make offering to lord Muthua and lord Maruti. Coconut, date, lemon, are offered and decorative plates are made out of *Palsia* root. The bullocks are decorated with these plates. They then come with their bullocks and take around the idols of lord Maruti and Lord Muthua, and wait for others to come. When all gather there one after another, they drive their bullocks through the *Toran* tied by the Chaudhury at the village entrance. The bullocks are to duck a little and go through. If the *Toran* is torn accidentally by a bullock, then the owner has to pay rupee one, and the Chaudhury fixes it again. The owner of the bullocks take them round the village and reach their houses where they are received by his wife with *arti.* She spreads a blanket in the courtyard and give fodder to the bullocks, and she also gives her husband a *Kardanha* (waist band) of thread and some coins as gift. Then he visits other participants and finally comes back to the house. He makes offering to family ancestors at the *Dharan* and takes his meal. After night meal the man, dholya and Pavila gather near Muthua and observe *jagaran* (spending night without sleeping) by singing and dancing till dawn. The next day, the festival food items are prepared which include *puri, dal* and rice in the evening the girls dance near Muthua. The boys also dance which make the ceremonial end of the *Danda* dance and then the boys in group go to the nearby steam to make offering. The sticks used in the dance are immersed in the water. With the end of the *pola* festival the swing is removed and the swing songs for the girls end for the year. After this the *chilori* dance for the girls start. *Pola* starts on new moon day of September.

In the contact areas they also observe Deoegares in the month of *Bhado.* They go to nearby Vishnu temple. Also, the some areas they participate in Ganpati festival, particularly by those who are in Maharashtra. On the first day of *andharpak* (dark half) *Kuar* they enshrine *purkha* of the ancestors and make offerings daily for fifteen days. On the fifteenth day it is immersed in the nearby stream. Some do it for two days only. After this *Deotirath* (pilgrimage to temples) starts. At the new moon of October comes the *gomaj dasera.* All the village gods are worshipped. Subscriptions are raised from each house and then with that they purchase a he goat and a she goat. Arrangements are also made for *jawari* from the contribution. Bhagat does the Panchayati puja (offering on behalf of all villages) and both the goats are sacrificed. First turmeric is put and water is sprinkled on them and as they tremble they are offered. Date, lemon, coconut, etc. remain as the items of offerings. Sweets are offered to mother goddess. Cooking is done at the *Kheda Gomaj* and the food is shared by the head of the houses and other men. Women and children do not go. Bhagat announces the date for tying the charm string for the ladies. They should come to the Bhagat's house on the day and Bhagat ties the string around the neck. One or two days after *Gomoj Dasera* the *Parihar dasera* commence. All the medicine men proceed on pilgrimage to fixed deity and offer a goat and a chicken, eat and drink and then they dance until the god comes into them. In the evening they return to the village and dance for the whole night in their own house. In the morning all of them again gather with drums and dance and sing until they are possessed by their god. After this, they give divine protection string (*Dora*) to ladies.

In return, the ladies give one and a half kilo of rice and similar quantity of wheat flour, one coconut, a chicken, etc. In the evening ladies take their food there. Nine days after *gomaj dasera* comes *Nawai*. Again the medicine men dance and at each house they keep a white pumkin. Four sticks are partially inserted into it and the fruit stands on these. This is to give a rough buffalo shape. Previously in distant past they used to do buffalow sacrifice. The horn and the tell of the animal used to be cut and it was taken through the village lanes. The blood drops which is believed to purify the village and keep the village free from evil spirit. Then, a few drops of blood is also poured near Muthua before butchering it finally. But this practice has ceased to take place for a long time and they keep the white pumpkins as a replica. In the evening the medicine man comes with sword or heavy knife to cut these pumpkins.

In the evening one person is asked by the Patel to bring some bamboo, twigs of *shami* tree, *Rona gram, Bhuludi* or *Bhilava* leaves with branches and *Dobo gram*. All this are tied in a bunch and planted near *Muthua*. This is called *Jago*. Near this, rope for tying the bullocks, ordinary rope, plough share brought from patel's house and kept. The youth observe *jagaran* (dancing through night) near Muthua. The drummers and flute players give them company. A basket containing about fifteen kilos of rice is brought from *Patil's* house and kept near *Jago.* They get some cereals from each house in addition to some quantity for the various services on that festival.

*Till sankrant* is observed three days after the full moon of *Pous.* It is basically a festival of the ladies. Only those who are in their menstrual cycle abstain from this. The ladies make offering to Sankrant baba in the frontal courtyard (south side), so that their children suffering from illness will be cured. Those who do not have any issue remain aloof from this. At about nine in the morning, they make the offering in sitting position facing east. They prepare *laddu* (sweet balls) of *till* (linseed) with *jaggary.* The place is first cleaned and a fresh coat of cow dung plaster is applied. They remain on fast till the offering of *pujan* camphot, two coconuts and *till laddu* (sweet). In the month of *Mah Panchayati puja* is offered to goddess *Hardoli* or *Ardoli* by Bhumka. The adult make observes fast till the *puja* (offering) is performed. Women and kids do not go to the shrine. Subscription are collected for the celebration from each household. *Kala Bhairu* or *Kal Bhairau* is a *gen* (main follower worrior) of the goddes Hardoli. White goat is offered to Mata, while for the Kal Bhairav black goat is offered. The Bhagat makes the sarifice. They cook the meat and then distribute them equally to the households. Only the head of the houses remain there. After distribution all start taking their food at a time. In the month of *Maha Shivratri* is also observed. Though, this is not a village level festivals, it involves a large section of the Korku. On the eve of Maha Shivratri, the Korku go on pilgrimage to *Chota Mahadeo* at Bhupali (Betul) or to *Bada Mahadeo* of Pachmarhi (Hoshangabad) or to other Mahadeo temples in the region.

Pachmarhi Mahadeo is not only popular among the Korku but also from other tribal groups of central India, and also attract caste Hindus. The Korku were traditionally in the management of the Temple.

Pachmarhi has its own importance being the sole hill station in Satpura system. It is the largest hill station in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Not only has it provided a feast to the nature lovers, but also it is dotted with ancient temples, caves and place of worship. It developed as a cantonment town and is a treasure for medicinal plants. Pachmarhi is the first reserve declared as early as in the nineteenth century. It attracted pilgrims and nature tourists through out the year. The largest fair at Pachmarhi held on the eve of Maha Shivratri when streams of pilgrims tribal as well as non-tribals from the Mahakoshal and Vidarbha unite. Chaura Baba, Bada Mahadeo (cave temple) and Gupta Mahadev are the three temples visited by the pilgrims. All of three temples were under the supervision of Korku Jagirdars. The management is now under the administration, and Akhada of Saiva set of Hindu order. Besides, Korku, other tribals of the region also undertake their pilgrimage to pachmarhi.

*Fagun* or *Holi* is the biggest festival for the Korku. This falls in March of full moon. The Korku get prepared for a long time and eagerly wait fit the festival. Holi is the younger sister of Korku. For five days she plays throwing water, colour, ashes, dust and dung. Her husband's name is Bhimle. The Holi that is burnt is five long bamboo poles calles '*tura*' set up like a *teepee* (tripod) and bound with a vine called *jul.* On the very top of it are placed the flowers of jungle flame. *Bhivala* is set up in the village wile. Holi is arranged outside the homestead. *Bhivala* is lighted in the morning while *Holi* at night. In the evening all men, at least one man from each house, gather to perform the *puja.* They offer *Kumkum,* date, almonds lemon, *puri,* cooked rice and *dal* (pulse). The offering then is distributed among the children. Then they go to the river from have their bath. Coming back they cook their food and eat. In the evening the Holi is lighted and the ladies dance and sing *Fagua* songs. The festival is very expensive. The korku families start saving money in well advance to meet the forthcoming expenses. They do not even bother to take loan from the money lender paying high rate of interest for the occasion. The amount of subscription for the festival to be paid by each family is fixed by the Chaudhury under the instruction of the Patel. A day earlier, five or seven youths go to forest to cut the bamboo for Holi. Near the bamboo grove they offer turmeric colored rice and cut seven good bamboos, also they collect some bamboo strips. This is called *Dhondokdi* or *Huditud.* Once a youth does this, he has to participate for five consecutive years. These are taken to the site for celebrating Holi. The cast carrying the Tuba and driver is received by the wife of the Patel at the entrance of the village. In the evening one '*Tanbu*' pole is fixed at the place of Holi where the people make offerings. The boys from two groups, one remain near the Holiwhile other remain near the Bhivala. The boys make the fire earlier and keep it ready. First they worship Holi and than make offerings to ancestors at Dharan. The youths, sit in a group verandah and sign Fagua songs accompanied by beating drums and *Timki* for the whole night. The girls dance Fagua in the central thoroughfare and sing songs. The boys sleep near the holi and others go to the groups of youths singing Fagua songs. In the morning the *fagua* singers cut down the *Bhivala.* Now they start erecting the holi (a wooden pole of teak wood). All those bamboo are tied with bamboo strips at the top. The lower portion is kept free. Then it is tied with '*jujul*' at five or seven place called '*pagdi*'. Then it is decorated with *jamun* leaves and *palasi* flower. Some leaves which look like of human figures are made and allowed to hung from the tied bamboo strips. The holi erection is completed before sunrise. The women prepare meal. The eldest man of the house make offering to the holi in the afternoon, the Bhivala is not worshipped because it has already been cut down. Than they make offering at Dharan. At the time of erection of holi the drummer and flute players play their instruments. The people wear new cloth and reach the place of holi. They embrace each other. Boys play drum and sing song while girls dance.

People remember those whom they have lost since last holi and weep. The coconut is also put in the flame but they alert boys take it out. The coconuts so taken out of the flame after its offering are gathered at a place. The Bhumka and other remain alert and do not allow the bamboo of holi to fall on the earth. They catch the falling bamboo and cut it and put on the basket. Some take bamboo for making *sesenda* (take a few pieces to there house on which then hen hatch egg) with the permission of the Bhumka.

They then make offering to '*Ravi*' and '*Khendar*' after the holi being properly burnt the head of the house go to *holi,* bow down and put *tika* mark on his forehead with the ashes of holi. Then the boys sing songs and go to holi from Bhivala and come bach. They repeat thrice and shout '*Hudi Bobole sirivji*'. This is to invite the girls. The girls join the boys with the last song and sing fagua songs. They with the help of rope try to prevent the boys group to go to Bhivala. They keep a pot filling with water in front of boys group. Some money is dropped in the pot by the boys group. The boys finally reach Bhivala and from there they go to the patels house while singing songs. These songs and called '*Jhumtaka gana*'. At Patels house, they smoke and go to their house after deciding after next days programme. The women also return to their house. Next day, is *Dhulandi* or the play of colours. All get involved in the play except the head of the house who is to look after the house. On this day they start '*Fagua Mangna*' from other villages. They form a group consisting of girls and boys. The girls dance and sing while boys play drum and sing songs. When they go to the neighbouring village, they first go to the holi of that village bow down and than enter the village.

At the entry, one pot is kept filled with water in which the group put some coins. They start '*Fagua Mangna*' from the Patel's house, the girls dance and sing while boys sing at every house and get one to two kilos of cereals. The cereals thus collected is sold to a person of that village and the money is kept. This way, party from each village visits the other. The boys and girls have their respected leaders who keep the money. They called '*fagua*' for the five days till *panchami* day (five days after fool moon). For the whole period they do not do any work.

On the Panchami day, the *panch* meeting is called, and the money or cereals collected by the boys party and the girls' are put together. Then a grand feast is organized outside the village settlement area. This is called *Gotho* enjoyed by all. The Bhumka make a line from Holi to Bhivala with the help of ashes from Holi. This marks the end of *Fagua*. The parties from any other village do not enter the village crossing the sacred line made using the ashes of *Holi*.

In the evening the Bhumka with the help of some youths takes a basket full of ash. They sing and beat the drums. This ash is immersed in the well or river, and offerings are made by the Bhumka. After this, the heads of the houses make offerings at *Dharan*. The Bhumka, make offerings to Muthua. Then they sing the last song of '*fagua*'. After that, they embrace each other. Then they sing one song each of *Gogolya*, *chachiri* and *dhandel* which make the beginning of the season of all these three dances. During these days, the Meghnath deo is worshipped. There remains a fair, but the date is not fixed. This can be observed by one or two days later also. It is fixed on such date which does not clash with that of the neighbouring village. Meghnath is worshipped for cure and fulfilment of wishes. The people also come to fulfil their vow. Bhumka remain there who make offering for others. There is a swing fixed on the top of Meghnath in a way to move in a circular fashion. People erect *jeri* or *jhanda* at a open space. Oil and *gerul* (colour) is applied on the *jeri* so as to make it slipery and difficult to climb. The ladies encircle it keeping a stick in their hands. The boy attempt to climb up the pole as on the top of the *jeri* is a cloth having some coins and some food. The women give good beating to the boys trying to climb up. Even after the beating, they try to climb up to reach the cross bar attached to it. On the top of it also tied one cloth containing *gur*, coconut and rupee and a quarter. His associates and friends help him to climb and save from the beating of women. As he goes little up *jeri*, his companions disperse to avoid beating. Due to the beating, sometime some boys do not dare to try. Some also keep ashes and dust in their *dhoti* which falls as they climb up. This help them to hold the *jeri* and also blinds the ladies beating from down. He then take cloth pouch having gift which is called '*jeri Tithia*'. Money he takes, and coconut and jaggery are shared by others. While coming down, he also has to face beating.

Rani gomaj is worshipped by some only once in three years. It is usually the fulfillment of vow to Rani for healing. The couple go to the burnt holi after the puja is over. Both wear white dress the ends of which are tried together as in marriage. A small trench is dug and filled with live coal from holi. The couple walk over the burning coal five times. The god is supposed to enter into them so that their feet are not burnt. Bhivala gomaj mentioned above is believed to be the husband of holi. It is associated with rain. In June when they begin calling for rain, they call his name, Bhagwan is the given but he has left it in Bhivala's and Hanuman's hands. The most important of all gods worshipped during Holi is Meghnath deo or Lanka Ravan. He is worshipped in fulfilling a vow taken for cure from sickness. The Bhumka makes the offering on behalf of the devotees. The devotee swing an odd number of times like, five, seven or nine times. On one end of the swing the devotee sits while another person rotate the swing on a circular tract with the help of a rope tied to the other end of the swing which hangs from there. The pole is freshly painted every year before the festival of holi. The annual fair is organized every year on this day in the evening. Chicken offering is a must in the process. The Mela day is fixed in a way not to clash with those organized in the neighbouring villages. This way, they can also visit the Melas in the surrounding villages. After Holi, the marriage songs start, and the marriage specific dances are danced. In the evening these are organized as a matter of practice, as well as for making the people aware about the marriage season.

*Akhaji* is another important festival observed by the Korku. This is on the third day of the *junarpark* (bright half) of *Baisaki* month. *Panchayati puja* is offered to goddess Hardoli. Contributions are collected from each household. The Bhumka makes the offering sitting facing east. Women and children do not come out. Only heads of the house attend. Patel makes the arrangement with the assistance of Chaudhury under the guidance of Bhumka. A white she-goat to mother Hardoli, and a black he-goat to Kala are offered. Then the meet is cooked there and the assembled men share it. It is distributed ancong the members present who consume here, and nothing is taken to the house. This is an auspicious day for any work to start and specially for the solemnisation of marriage. They purchase a new earthen pot and make four bowls of earth in the name of *Asad, Shawan, Bhado* and *Kuar* month. Also they keep four Bengal gram in the name of these four months. This new pot is filled up with water on which a mango twig is placed and a red string is tied around the neck of the pot. Four bowls and four gram are wrapped in a cloth and kept immersed in the water inside the pot. Since the month *Mah* one member of the house do not take new fruits, and only he is entitled to make offering at about eleven in the morning. There is no restriction for others. Next day, at eleven they take out the cloth in which the bowls and grams were there. In Akhji they take new eartenware for the year. It is supplied by the *kumhar* or they purchase from market.

Besides these festival, Korku participate in the various regional festivals like *Ganpati Pujan*, or the national level festivals like *Ramnavaami, Raksha bandhan, Janmastami* etc. They are influenced by the local Hindu festivals, and they observe many of them.

Some other minor pujas are there in practice which can be listed as follows:

| Festival | Time | Performance |
|---|---|---|
| Siroto Puja | On full moon of Mah (February) | Lord Mahadeo worshipped by some people. Goat sacrifice is there, or a rooster offered. |
| Bhusum Puja | Every three year Puja performed in night | - |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lind itatakina and cando suraj takina (sun and moon worship) | In the month of April in Monday. | Worship at night, Goat or a rooster is sacrificed. |

*Raso puja* is the worship of grain. After the grain is threshed out *raso puja* is performed before it is stored in the grain forms in the house. With this they also worship the threshing floor, the central pole, winnowing stand (*paalki pujal*) known as *kharaja deo* and *meriyasi deto* are performed. For this a chicken or a rooster is usually sacrificed.

At the beginning of the farming season, the farmer sets out for his field with a coconut, *sindu,* etc. and leaves it in the name of *Dharti Maya* (mother earth). He says "Mother earth we are very simple folk. Look now we are sowing." Then he makes his offering and rub some of the red colour of the *sindur* on his forehead and on the forehead of the bullocks. Then, he takes a round of his farm land. After that he returns to his house. But from then sowing starts. Even in the planning of the kitchen garden certain rituals are observed. Ladies plant a coin and than set up the pestle used for pounding grain.

Then, taking a small child in her lap and another in the other shoulder she ceremonially began to plant the corn. The heavy pestle was to ensure a sturdy stalk, and the two children ensure bearing more number of earns on one stalk.

*Uthara puja* is the puja for healing of ailments, performed throughout the year. Whenever someone is ill the Bhagat is invited. If the person is curad, he is asked to make offerings. If he does not perform this puja the disease will reappear with more severity. So, round the year, they perform various pujas for something or other.

Among the Korku we have observed that they have intricate relations with nature. They are largely forest dwellers though they also live in plains. In every case, they have relation with their immediate nature and they try to master the nature with the help of spirit. Again the natural objects have been personified in some cases. For them *dharti* is the earth goddess, and the hills also have life. They also believe that trees have also life. Anthropomorphism is very much there in their ideas and thoughts. Through various spirits not only they try to control the nature but also to manipulate them so that good rains and timely rains may ensure a good crop. For various adverse conditions they try to control through propitiation of various deities. There national culture, if we scrutinise, find very much related to the ecology. For better cultivation, they make some provisions like making dykes and converting it into a terrace or plain field as far as possible. Such other things are done for exploitation and utilization of forest resource. The Korku in traditional villages are dependent for the most part of the rainy season on wild roots and tubers.

They pray for the abundant growth of those wild plants. Rituals plays a big role in their lives. The Korku feel better in there own surroundings due to their attachment to nature. The bare bodied children do not feel it very difficult to go out over in early hours. Scanty clothing put them in trouble, but their habitat is more familiar and useful to them. When they visit the plain areas, particularly during summer, they feel the scorching heat. In the forest and in the villages which are at a higher level they feel comfortable. In a nut shell, besides the ancestor worship, they put maximum weightage to the worship of those deities and spirits through which they can get a better condition for their surroundings. The relationship between the Korku, their habitat and the spirits is intricately woven and continuous.

They have the sense of pure and impure, and group several things under these two categories. But they perhaps have picked up this concept from the neighbouring Hindus. In their rituals and rites, they have been influenced by the local Hindus. To be specific in this regard, they not only claim themselves as Hindu but claim a clean caste status in the hierarchy. They maintain some distance from the scheduled castes and also with a number of tribal groups on the plea that many tribal groups had a tradition of taking beef. Many of our informants tried to make it clear that Korku is like *Gaoli* or the other clean caste among the Hindu. True in the first response they call themselves Korku but afterwards they try to emphasize there claim of Rajput ancestry. In Hoshangabad and Chhindwara they identify themselves with Mewari Thakur Korku. By Thakur their obvious reference is Rajput.

In the areas where they live with the Hindu caste groups they share the joy in various Hindu festivals. At Pahawardi or Shahpura Amdhona the Korku have a *Bhajan Mandali* (troup of singers the sing devotional songs). They sing Hindu devotional songs and the troup has a popularity in the area. Their performance is requisitioned by the various organizations. The group also sing with other *Bhajan Mandalis* whose members belong to clean castes. They have been found to be a followed of common Hindu saint and call the other followers of the same religious teacher as *bhaia* (brohter).

Korku have been marginally influenced by the Islamic doctrines. There is no large scale conversion to Christianity through a number of Churches are active in the area for more than half a century. Evangelical Lutheran Church. They have village welfare schemes, and also run hospitals and schools. Occasionally, some Korku have embraced Christianity.

We have already discussed at length about the magical beliefs and performances. The diseases are mostly due to evil spirits, the korku believe. There is Parihar or Bhagat or Bhumka (medicine man-cum-priest) to tacke them. The Parihar ties a charm around the neck of a person to protect him/her from disease or to cure. By the firth or seventh month of pregnancy, the Parihar ties the protective string to the expectant mother. The string is also tied after delivery to the mother again for the safety of the child.

Then the string is tied around the neck of the child. And finally this string is to be removed in a rita called '*EL*'. One goat and new clothes are purchased. The goat meat and rice are prepared. Alongwith the mother Parihar goes to the nearby river. The mother sits facing east on the ground and Parihar makes a circle around her with a vine (*Ela*). Parihar then perform the puja, and then he cut the vine and the string around the neck of the mother. The woman then leaves her cloth and other things with the parihar who takes both. Then she put on new set of dress. The jewellery also remain with the Parihar. On payment of rupees five to the Parihar she gets back the jewellery but not the old dress. The old dress is taken by Parihar. This is to be done if the child suffers from convulsions. There are several kinds of Maye deseases. There is *Konji Maye* (very fine rash) *Kali maya, Misi, Guna maya* etc. *Umun Maya* is small pox and it takes seven days to reach its peak and seven days to be cured. Until the fever remits the patient must not have bath, but whatever he wishes to take must be given. The medicine man comes and falls at the feet of the patient as he now possessed by the same pox goddess. Then a kind of incense offering is made. The gum from the *sala* tree is put on the burning coals under the cot of the patient, and smoke goes upto *Maya* as offering. People should not talk with the patient. One should go away else Maya will see you. She is great and a commoner do not have any right to see her. The family takes vow to make offering to Maya if she spare the patient. The *panchayati puja* (village level offering) is offered to Maya in February. Then individual offering is also made at that time. They in a group proceed to the place of Maya to make the offerings. The offerings are made by the Bhagat on behalf of villagers as a whole and also on individual basis.

After that, they prepare their food, offer to the deity and eat. They must offer whatever medicine man prescribes. Some times, he asks for *Korabiri* (fresh roled cigarate). The medicine man is led in a procession by the members of that household. He may ask for a goat or usually for *Karai Malida* (wheat flour fried and mixed with ghee and gur). Then they go to the *gomaj* shouting' *Maya, Maya*'. Instead of goat, some times a male calf in the name of the deity is left free to move in the village. The small pox patients can not take buffalo milk as Maya cursed the animal. The patient however can have cow milk.

Similarly, *Chatra* is known as 'have Maya'. It is greatly feared and those who die are not mourned and the body is cast out in a ravine and covered with a few branches. Similar beliefs are there for various other deseases.

A story suggests their feelings about Hindu god lord Hanuman. One day Maya came out of the river and found Hanuman blocking her way. Maya said, son get out of the road and let me go'. But Hanuman said 'no' I will not let you go. Maya got down from the horse and they began to fight. Then, Bhagawan came and asked Maya to let Hanuman move. But Maya was annoyed and said 'I will break his leg'. And she hit Hanuman and broke his leg. Then, Hanuman left and stopped blocking the way. Bhagawan said to Maya, 'when you visit any village, first seek permission of Hanuman. He is the head of the village'. It is for this reason that Hanuman is placed at the entrance of the village.

In the year 1973, meeting of all Baveria Korku was held at the village Fopa in Betul district. It was presided by Bishram Singh, a Korku leader from Shahpur. The amount of bride price was fixed and brought down to rupees ten and one hundred and sixty kilos of cereals, five kilos of pulses and a kilo of chilli powder. This has eased the situation and the grooms have been relieved of their heavy pressure. Generally, for paying bride they borrow money from the money lenders on a heavy rate of interest. Most of them fall into debt trap and can not pay back the loan. The meeting also denounced the continuence of the custom of goat offering on various festivals.

In another meeting in Melghat the arrangement for meat in marriage feast has been stopped. Now, the wedding feast remain only vegetarian preparations. This practice is followed for the fast at groom's house as well as at bride's house.

The Korku have their own nomenclature for the directions. North is *Dhola* or *Mangalisu,* south is *Beraru,* east is *Gomelat* and west is *Gonenam.* North is considered as auspicious, and east is most auspicious. The bride should enter through the north door on her arrival at her husband's house. But south is inauspicious, and the dead body is taken out through the south door. For any ritual performances they sit on the ground facing east. There are some beliefs. If one step on an egg shell he will get a seed under the feet. For the cure of mumps they look for a tooth of hyeana, grind it to powder, mix water to make into a paste and apply to the jaw. Some indigenous medicines are used for cure of daseases.

Among the Korku of the multiethnic villages where they are living with other tribes and castes there are *kutumb deo* of different natures. It consists of Mahadeo, Dhanbhai, Thakurdeo, Dulhadeo, Bhama Bhasmi deo, and Sanjai deo. In the traditional villages it is Mahadeo and Dulha deo considered as *Kutumb deo* or *Kul deo.* the term "*Kutumb*" is used sometimes in different ways.

During a calendar year, the *Panchayati Pujan* (community worship) in a Korku village is done for several times. Of this three are very important. These are when Khedadeo is worshipped in *dasera,* in the month of *mah* and in a *khai* offering are made, to Hardoli Maya. Besides, in Akhadi and Bhawi, the Bhagat offers puja on behalf of the village. Offerings are made to Meghnath deo in Holi at a communal level.

The Korku have a number of deities. They also observe the Hindu festivals. The change is mainly observed in the pattern of performance. Changes have also been observed in the things of offerings. Goat or hen sacrifice has been stopped in various rituals. Taking the auspicious dates for any rituals from a Brahmin is a tradition last developing. Previously, the Bhumka was the person to decide everything on this account. The monopoly has been broken. Though they have not been able to have the full services of the Hindu Branmin, they are trying to have them at least on the auspcious dates.

Some gods of the Hindu pantheon have made inroads in Korku pantheon. Mostly, it is the addition to their ritual and festival calendar. Some temples dedicated to Hindu god and goddesses have appeared. Previously it is mostly a heap of unhewer *stones* which represent the deity. Now, some concrete platform a have been constructed. Even some temples like that of Hanuman and Ganpati, etc. have come up in Korku territory.

For curing the desease and healing, they now do not totally depend on the medicinemna. It is not always the spirit responsible for various deseases, they argue. So, they go to hospitals and avail the services of the qualified doctors. But in the traditional villages there is a general apathy towards doctors. But in the traditional villages there is a general apathy towards doctors.

The concept of purity and pollution has also influenced them. Some think that these are pure, and other are not. In case of inter ethnic relations, this concept also play significant role. The Korku do not accept water or cooked food from the Scheduled Castes and few other tribal groups, like Bharia. The distance is maintained and they are not eager to bridge the gap.

Korku festival as a whole is a combination of Hindu tradition and that of there own. A transitory phase is previling. They have not yet abandoned their spirits nor they have been able to resist the acceptance of Hindu traits. Dance in festival is gradually on the wane. The Patel was the all powerful man in the village. Gradually, various type of dances are becoming rare for their performances in rituals. Actually, the Korku of the exposed area have little knowledge about there various dances, and they dance in a few items. In the evening recreation through dancing and singing have been replaced by enjoying a movie. They are also not well conversant with the various rituals. Radio and television attract them more where such facilities are within reach. In remote areas, they are left with no alternative than to resort to traditional dance forms and songs for entertainment. Changes have been observed in the content as well as language of the songs. Their brethren at Hoshangabad, Pachmari and Chhindwara districts have totally lost their dialect and have picked up local form of Hindi as media for communication.

Korku territory partly constitutes southern areas of Madhya Pradesh and northern part of Maharashtra States. The medium of instruction in the schools is Hindi and Marathi. So, they have picked up different languages in different states. In the process, they are replacing their own dialect by Hindi or Marathi. In a similar fashion, they have added several Hindu festivals. *Maha shivratri* is the most important festival in Pachmari, Hoshangabad, Betul and Chhindwara districts. Simultaneously, there has been revival of some old tribal traditions like making offerings to Khedadeo, Meghnath etc.

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# Agricultural Festivals of the Tribes of Jharkhand: A Functional Analysis

From the busy cities to the charming little villages, from the grotesque five star hotel right at the heart of the capital to the lonely hermitage embedded somewhere in the sprawling mountain, India pulsates with life with people drawn from different communities, different religions and different faiths. Life in India is a mosaic of colorful happenings. The festivals are not mere occasions but deep-rooted traditions and customs woven into the fabric of Indian life.

The rich diversity of India's population has given us festivals and holidays more abundant than those of any other cultures. Man gets tired on account of hard work or monotonous actions. He wants some change or variety; he wants relaxation, and something to cheer him up. These festivals make him cheerful and happy and give rest and peace. From very ancient times in the history of mankind, festivals have been an important feature of group life all over the world.

Religion is one of the most important aspects of culture studied by anthropologists and other social scientists. Not only is it found in every known human society, it also significantly interacts with other cultural institutions. One of the most important outward manifestations of religion is the performance of festivals and it has been an important feature of group life all over the world.

Different scholars have given different definitions of festival according to their own observation and finding. Asian Cultural Centre (1975), Charles Winick (1956) in the Dictionary of Anthropology, Gnanambal in her book Festivals of India (1967) defined festival in their own way. Taken together as a gist of definition, a festival is a social institution, which provides an occasion for individual or communal worship of different gods and deities, for eating the special food, wearing fine clothes and for meeting kith and kin. The primary theme of most of the festivals is religious but they have their social and psychological ends as well. They provide opportunities for social and psycholoaical ends as well. They provide opportunities for social groups and individuals to gain release from tensions and obtain emotional satisfaction in an atmosphere free from native cares and anxieties. They also promote a feeling of fellowship among the members of the group or participating in them.

Rituals and prayers followed by offerings are the essential features of festivals. Fasts are obligatory in many of them. Feasting and merriment, which are also very common, provide an element of joy. The rituals are accompanied by animal sacrifices; some festivals also attract a large number of people from the neighboring areas and from distinct places too. Sometimes fairs are organized to buy and sell miscellaneous wares, and amusements are provided for the visitors to enjoy.

## FESTIVAL AS AN INDEX OF CULTURE

Previously, the subject of religion and festivals was considered purely a philosophical matter. Now, it is no more a subject of godly orders which could not be investigated, touched, put to test, cross-examined, questioned, proved, commented, disapproved, ridiculed, or discarded due to the belief that it is sacred, superhuman and beyond the power of human investigation. Now, it is purely a general subject for sociologists and anthropologists to study and examine it as a social fact. Only the approach has changed, from philosophical to scientific.

Anthropological study of festivals is highly important specially when we are concerned about the tradition-bound communities of India. Study of festival acts as mirror which reflects the images of religion, martial culture, human behaviour, value systems, morals, ethics, family organization, marriage, economic, law and politics. A reason for studying tribal festivals is that many of them are rapidly being transformed, or are disappearing altogether. The recording of these cultural and religious systems not only adds to the understanding of cultural phenomena by adding comparative material, but preserves knowledge of these unique ways of life for posterity. Thus, the study of festival is also important in nation building for recording them for posterity before these are lost.

Anthropologists studying festival as a social institution, begin their research by recording the regularities of its expression within a given culture. When enough data on festivals are at hand, cross-cultural comparison can be made, and the similarities and differences thus revealed be analysed. This may begin anywhere an increase in population or technological innovations or economic improvement. Because culture is a complex whole, each change is reflected in other cultural institutions and throughout the cultural structure.

The study of festivals can reveal material on various aspects of social and cultural life of the society. A study of cultural change can also be had after studying tribal festivals. Traditions and customs are influenced by many factors, both internal and external. The conflict between traditional leaders and people may come to such a point which may disrupt their cultural system and create chaos and confusion among the people. The people have become selective in their celebration of festivals as the number of festivals are increasing due to cultural contact. Change in the economic position sometimes affects the ideology behind a custom or a tradition and finally the presence of strangers who are aliens to the tribal culture creates confusion and forces them to change their way of living and celebration of their rituals and ceremonies and sometimes leads to borrowing of cultural traits of the aliens without understanding the meaning behind it.

## TRIBES IN JHARKHAND

According to 2001 census report the total tribal population of Jharkhand is 7087068 and the total number of tribal groups is 32. The tribals constitute 26.3% of the state's population as against 8.2% for the country as a whole (2001 Census Report).

A large number of anthropologists and other social scientists have given a number of definitions and characteristics of the tribe. It seems useless here to repeat the definitions of tribe, but, today, the tribes which answer to the anthropologists' conception of the ideal type are rarely to be found. We only find the tribes in transition.

Beteille (1977 : 14) opined that in India, we cannot have a readymade definition with which one can go into the field and locate a tribe. None of the tribes exists as a separate society. They have all been absorbed, in varying degrees, into the wider social structure. The process of absorption has been going on for years.

During the course of history, the tribes have been exposed to the working of several agencies of change like Hinduism, Christianity, urbanization, industrialization, developmental agencies and education. For centuries the tribals are living in close contact with the Hindus and they felt inclined to emulate the Hindu way of life and gradually borrowed a number of traits of the Hindu society and culture on selective basis which went a long way in sanskritizing their way of life that is religion, festival, social structure, economy, education, values, ideals and the like.

In the light of modern context it does not seem possible to put an iron wall between a tribe and a caste especially on cultural level. Ghurye (1959: 19) also considered the tribals as 'backward Hindus'. Sahay (1980) states that "a tribe is basically a structural concept and when we talk about the conversion from a tribe to caste, or use the appellation 'Hinduised tribe' in fact, it mainly refers to the change-over from one type of social structure to the other". He further says that the impact of Hindus or Hinduism on tribals - in fact, we are not concerned with two different cultural groups but with a single 'Hindu culture' - does not reflect inter-group but intra-group interaction.

A number of Jharkhand tribes like Kharwar, Bhumij, Mai Paharia, Bedia, Chero, Kisan, Parahaiya, Binjhia and Bathudi claim themselves that they are Hindu castes. Their way of life is more similar to Hindus than to tribal (as the anthropologists defined). Other major tribes of Jharkhand viz. Santhal, Oraon, Munda and Ho also have adopted the life and culture of their Hindu neighbours. Thus, the tribal gradually acquired the characteristics of a caste.

Under the influence of Christianity, a large section of Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Korwa and other tribes of Jharkhand have adopted the life-style and culture of Christians. Some tribal belts of Jharkhand are in the grip of industrial revolution and consequent upon a rapid urbanization comparatively in a short span of time, the region has become subjected to 'industry-based urban explosion', and this explosion has changed the ethos, -world-view, way of life and culture of the tribal population of the region to a considerable extent.

It has been observed during the field investigation that almost all the tribal groups of Jharkhand celebrate a number of festivals besides their traditional ones. In the absence of the long-range history of the cultural characteristics of a Hindu group vis-a-vis a tribal group, it is difficult to distinguish between the criteria of Hindu and tribal festivals.

## TRIBAL FESTIVALS

The tribal society is a simple society where we find homogeneity and absence of hierarchy, it has been argued that the tribals are not separate group, rather they represent a layer of Hindu culture. The proper description of these people is that they are the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society. Owing to their homogeneity and simplicity the observance of their festival is not complex.

Every festival - Hindu or tribal - has its two aspects - sacred and secular. These two aspects of a festival are intimately inter-woven yet analytically distinct. The distinction between the two is not spurious, but is quite difficult to handle because almost every form of human behaviour can be invested with religious meaning. Religious behaviour thus cannot be identified outside its cultural context or its religious setting. Religious attitudes and emotions are not necessarily different from any other secular attitudes and emotions. Eating, drinking, music, dancing and singing are the secular things but they become sacred when they are performed to communicate with, or please the gods. The criterion of the sacred then becomes significant only in its religious setting. It is the supernatural which is sacred and which evokes certain actions and emotions, but the specific forms which these actions and emotions assume are culturally learned responses. The sacred performances are held to please the god or supernatural for the communal or individual welfare. The sacred aspect of a festival may be understood in terms of Prof. Vidyarthi's (1961 A) three analytic concepts - sacred geography, sacred performances and sacred specialists. The secular aspects of festivals provide the people with occasions for eating, drinking, singing, dancing, merry-making, social visits and enjoying visits to fairs.

The object of tribals religious, socio-religious rites, ceremonies, feasts and festivals is to secure confidence in times of crisis and danger and acquire strength, good luck for the community, the family and the individual through contact and communion with mysterious beneficent powers or spiritual beings, by means of offerings and sacrifices.

The tribal's religious worship is mainly communal or congregational at the occasion of festival. Personal worship is not well developed among any section of the tribes of Jharkhand. On the occasion of every festival, the head of each family makes sacrifices, offerings and libation to their ancestor spirits in their sacred tabernacle. As for the average unsophisticated tribal, it is generally only on occasion of his public worship and the festivals associated with them that he experiences the religious thrill and feels himself, for the time being, lifted out of the drab level of the life of the senses to the higher level of the life of the spirit. Under the mutual stimulation of public worship during the festival, the worshippers' life feeling is intensified and they feel or imagine themselves to be in touch with higher powers and are inspired with confidence and hope and a sense of security amid the uncertainties of life. As a result of such communal festivals, the 'we' feeling is intensified and social solidarity is strengthened. A number of Jharkhand tribes do believe in Hindu gods and deities and have adopted a large number of festivals as well.

## Area of Research

As indicated in the title of the paper, only the festivals of Jharkhand tribes have been taken into account. An attempt has been made to concentrate on four cultural types of tribal Jharkhand as classified by Vidyarthi (1958) on the basis of their economy. Though the passing reference to a number of festivals of other tribal groups of Jharkhand has been made, the main emphasis has been given on plain agriculturist tribes - Santhal, Oraon and Munda (as most of the tribes of Jharkhand are agriculturist), the hill cultivators - Maler and Birjia, the hunters and food collectors - Korwa and Birhor, the artisan tribes - Lohra and Asur. For an empirical study of the Santhal festivals, a village called Panchgarh under Sahebgunj district was selected.

Bishunpur village in Gumla district was selected for the study of Oraon festivals. As the Khunti district is dominated by Munda tribe, so a village named Dumadagga was chosen for recording the festivals of Munda. In Santhal Pargana district a village named Tandla was taken into account for the study of Maler. The festivals of the Birjia, Birhor, Lohra and Asur were studied in Birjiatoli, Beti (both for Birhor and Lohra) and Jovipat villages respectively which all come under Gumla district, whereas the Korwa festivals were studied at Tehri village of Palamu district of Jharkhand. The festivals of Hinduised tribes like Parahaiya, Chero, Kherwar etc. have not been taken into account because they celebrate a larger number of Hindu festivals than their original ones. The important festivals of the above mentioned tribes were recorded during the field work carried out by the author. The explanations of other festivals are based on primary sources and partly on secondary sources.

## Review of Earlier Studies

Every community of the world has its own culture, tradition, ethnic identity, ethos, world views and religious beliefs. The social scientists, the scholars, the administrators, the missionaries of various denominations and the persons with academic interest always try to study these cultural traits of the community to a lesser or greater extent. So far as this study of festivals is concerned, very sketchy data are available to us. Jane (1953) wrote a book on temple festivals in which she described Bali's ancestor worship and the celebration of different festivals at various agricultural operations. The calendar of the British festivals has been depicted by Alexander (1964) in a book form. He describes that Britons are unabashed in their love for the nation's legends, superstitutions and ancient customs and are proud of being steeped in colourful ceremonial and dazzling pageantry. A small book for children has also been published by Asian Co-publication Programme of UNESCO (1975). This book introduces to the young readers the festivals celebrated in nine Asian countries. One festival from each country like Singapore, Iran, Japan, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and the Philippines has been included in the book. Roland (1975) in his book examined some of man's past entertainments - the most significant festivals and spectacles of past times - and has traced their evolution to the present day.

In the Indian context, Buck published a book in which he described the faiths, fairs and festivals of India. An article appeared in *Man in India* by Basu (1927) in which he illustrated the spring festival on all India basis. The author compared and analyzed the different traits of spring festival from one province to another and highlighted how the core element of a festival changes from one place to another. Lall (1933) provided a long series of festivals mainly celebrated by the Hindus on all India basis. A detailed study of *Charak* festival has been made by Chattopadhyay (1936). Srivananda's (1947) book gave the picture of many Hindu festivals, *vratas*, fairs and eclipses with their inner philosophy. How the Assamese laugh, sing and dance at the time of different festivals has been described by Barua and Baveja (1956). Bhowmick from time to time (1957, 1964, 1965) described the different festivals like *Bandna, Gajan, Karam* and other folk festivals of Midnapur in West Bengal.

How the festivals may be utilized for the education purposes among the children or among the young is well illustrated in a small book written by Avinashilingam (1961). Gnanambal (1967) described the myths, deities and cultural changes through festivals mostly celebrated by the Hindus. Thomas (1971) and Sharma (1978) also wrote about the different festivals of India. The details of the festivals collected by them make very short studies.

The Social Studies Division of the Census Operations of Government of India, among many studies of social life and culture, also undertook the study of the distribution of traditional fairs and festivals observed in different States of India in 1961-71. The inspiration to study these fairs and festivals came from a similar publication, made by the census operations of West Bengal in 1951 census. Based on the data collected by the field staff of the different state governments the census operations collected information through a carefully constructed questionnaire prepared in a series of conferences of census superintendents.

The data about these fairs and festivals have been collected in tabular form giving the details about the location of the fairs or the festivals, the month and date of the fair or festival as well as the average number of persons attending the festivals or fair etc.

Along with these details some salient features of the festivals, the series of photographs of the actual celebrations, the temples, the prayers, the fair, the procession etc. as well as the distribution maps of the fairs, festivals, temples, ghats and other shrines of different religious groups falling in each state have been carefully collected and are of special significance for any deep study of religious beliefs and practices, the varieties of social-religious and economic interactions of the people of a region and for that matter of the whole Indian nation. These census volumes on the festivals and fairs are very useful and their advantages have been enumerated by the then Registrar General in the Foreword in the following words:

> The scholar will find in these lists much to execute his curiosity. Firstly, they show what an extensive network of seasonal and perennial markets, village fairs still provide to native craftsmanship and industry. Secondly, they help to connect economic streams with social and religious movements. Thirdly, they suggest how a succession of small fairs in a time series culminates in a very big fair almost always in the heart of particular area, and how this big event gradually subsides through another time series of small fairs, so that an endless cycle of trade, social and religious intercourse is kept in motion. Fourthly, they investigated the situation of the artists and manufacturers, the mode of providing their goods, the usual rate of their labor, and any particular advantage they may enjoy their comparative affluence with respect to the cultivators of the land, their domestic usage, the nature of their sales, and the regulations respecting their markets. Fifthly, they can very greatly help in reconstructing ancient and not so ancient trade routes in the country, and again what Buchanan-Hamilton was asked to investigate "the nature of the conveyance of goods by land and water, and the means by which this may be facilitated, especially by making or repairing roads.

The perusal of these volumes on fairs and festivals bring out the variations in the festivals and fairs, which are held in different states. They also reflect as to how on these occasions toys, sweets, vessels, religious articles and farming goods, stationery and bangles are sold invariably in these fairs and festivals all over the country observed by any religious groups. Along with this and other similarities, the differences between regions, religions and sects, the respective traditions and customs for that matter "style of life" are also reflected from these reports.

Among the distinguishing features of some of these reports which are available for review the report on Pondicherry state consists of two parts. The first part contains a detailed description of the prominent temples in each commune as well as the important festivals celebrated there. It is followed by a tabular statement giving relevant information regarding all the temples. The second part contains a description of the prominent festivals celebrated in each commune, apart from those observed in specific temples. The details of such fairs and festivals are also given in tabular form. The report is fully illustrated with the photographs of the temples and of the fairs.

The report of Uttar Pradesh, however, begins with the table on above theme and also ends with tables without giving any descriptions or analysis. It does not contain either photographs or sketches of the fairs and festivals but it does show the distribution of the fairs and festivals in the district maps of Uttar Pradesh.

The report on Kerala runs into two volumes. While the first volume presents the descriptions of the festivals of the Hindus, Muslims and Christians observed in different parts of Kerala, the second volume only contains statement in tabular form regarding these festivals and fairs. The first volume on Kerala is also fully illustrated with photographs, a few of them being coloured photographs.

The report on Bihar prepared by the census superintendent, S.D. Prasad and his team, gives a brief description of selected festivals observed in different anchals of the districts of Bihar in the first part and them in a series of tables summarizes the basic details about the important fairs. Though the report is not at all illustrated, it contains graphs depicting the congregation of fairs in terms of months and a reading of these graphs reflects that all over the state except the tribal districts, the higher number of festivals are in the months of *Kartik* and *Aswin*.

The two reports on Manipur and Tripura are descriptive and reveal most of the festivals of the different areas. The monograph on Manipur describes at some length the *a* HincLu festivals (Saraswati Puja, Holi, Rathyatra, Janmashtami, Durga Puja, Diwali, Neengol ChakkOuba, Rasheḙla and Cheiraoba). In addition to thee festivals of Kabui, Thafngkul Nagaland Christians have also been described. Some of the national festival likes the Republic aay etc. celebrated in the hilly regions, are also described and illustrated with photographs. The festivals of Tripura have been described in terms of three zones (1) Central, (2) Southern, and (3) Northern. Central zone presents main concentration of fairs and festivals which are influenced and guided by Hindu religion whereas Buddhist and Christian festivals and fairs dominate Southern and Northern zones respectively. In addition to the description of the main festivals, a catalogue of other festivals with the details have been given in a tabular form.

Among the available reports on fairs and festivals, Andhra Pradesh has published four volumes each describing the fairs and festivals of a particular district. Various festivals and fairs observed in the villages and *talukas* have been described at length. When all the district volumes are completed, taken together, they will present a detailed picture of the fairs and festivals in Andhra Pradesh and will prepare broad ground for research in depth.

In addition to the general survey of the fairs and festivals, the census operation initiated detailed study of the festivals like Moharram observed in two important Muslim dominated cities of Lucknow and Delhi and the famous Onam festivals of Kerala. The first monograph on Moharram is based on the study made at both public and family levels. Data were collected by participant observation, interview-methods and by administering ten types of schedules for different purposes. The details of observances have been recorded as well as illustrated with photographs and sketches.

In general, it was found that performance of Moharram has been affected by general rise in cost of living, westernization and modernization, abolition of *Zamindari* system, and partition of the country.

The Onam festival of Kerala has also been studied at some length by A.M. Kurup under the auspices of the census operations. The monograph on Onam festival, covering fifty pages runs into nine chapters. Kurup examines the Onam festival, in terms of the traditions and cultural setting of Kerala.

Mathur (1953) studied the Chero tribal community of Uttar Pradesh and their festivals. The festivals of the Koli of Maharashtra were studied by Gawanliar (1955). The extensive and intensive study of the Lodhas of West Bengal was conducted by P.K. Bhowmick and among other books and articles on Lodha he published a paper on annual festival of the Lodha of West Bengal (1957) in which a complete picture of the festival is projected. Another paper by Parmanik came to light in the year 1959 about the flower festival among the Santhal. Sinha (1957) recorded about the expression of sentiments in the songs associated with the Karam festival of Munda of rural Manbhum.

The link between the "little tradition" and "great tradition" has been depicted while describing Bishu festival by Kapoor (1960), which is celebrated in the month of *Baisakh* in the hills of N.W. Himalayas. The hunting festival of the tribals of Bankura district has also been studied by Sarkar (1962) in detail. Mohanty (1962) studied the Ind festival of Orissa tribals. The different festivals of the Oraon of Sunderban have also been studied by Raha (1964). An attempt was made by Banerjee and Sarkar (1964) to study the influence of agriculture as reflected on the economic and socio ritual aspect of the community life of the Santhal, living in an absolutely rural atmosphere, with agriculture as their basic economy.

How the annual hunt is an important channel for extension of social relations among the Pauri Bhuiyas, the tribe of Central India is well described by Kumar (1964). Reddy (1968) in his article "A Changing Festival", opined that traditions and customs are influenced by many factors both internal and external. The conflict between the traditional leaders and people comes to such a point which disrupts their cultural system and creates chaos and confusion among the people. The people have become selective in their celebration of festival as the number of festivals are increasing due to culture contact.

In our academic stock, we have a very scanty account of the studies on tribal festivals. Anthropologists, who are usually labelled as the students of "little traditions" have tried to collect data on tribal festivals only while they were engaged in some monographic study of different tribal communities. So, while describing the ethnographic detail of a tribe they also wrote some paragraphs on different fairs and festivals of the tribe. These authors also contributed papers to different journals on festivals together with the other aspects of tribal life. Thus, we find that most of the work on tribal festivals has been written in article form in different national and international journals. We may also get some notes on tribal festivals in different ethnographic books.

At the beginning of this century, Bradley Britt (1903) and Bainbridge (1907) improved upon the earlier studies and published their works titled *Chotanagpur, a little known province of the Empire* (in book form) and *The Saroars of Rajmahal Hills* (in the form of an essay) respectively. In his book Bradley Britt attempted the first holistic study of contemporary Chotanagpur and its tribes. His study, however, was mainly confined to the customs, festivals and village life of the Oraon, Munda, Birhor and Kharia. Bainbridge, unlike Bradley Britt, confined himself exclusively to the study of the Saora tribe of Rajmahal hills. Among other details, he showed special interest in describing the Rites of Passage, festivals, rituals and the religion of the tribe.

It was at this time that Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, father of Indian anthropology, appeared on the scene of tribal studies in Jharkhand. His first book *The Mundas and their Country* (1912) is a monumental achievement for the first Indian scholar in the field. After writing extended history he described the ethnography of the Munda to some extent. He mentioned in his first book that the Mundas observe about 12 varieties of festivals and they are - (1) the Mage Parab, (2) the Phagu festival, (3) the Ba Parab or flower festival, (4) the Hon-Ba-Parab, (5) the Batauli or Kadleta, (6) the Karam, (7) Dasai, (8) Kolom Singh Bonga, (9) Jom Nawa, (10) The Ind Parab, (11) the Soharai and (12) the Soso Bonga festival. All these festivals mentioned by S. C. Roy are very short and scanty.

Roy published other two-volume monograph *Oraons of Chotanagpur* (1915). The second volume of the book dealt solely with the Oraon religion. Showing a deep understanding for their religious beliefs and practice, Roy vividly described the rituals, festivals and the magical content of the Oraon religion.

Sarat Chandra Mitra in 1921 published a paper "On Karam Dharma Festival of North Bihar and its Munda Analogus". Mitra compared the similarities and differences of *Karam Dharma* as celebrated in North Bihar and in Chotanagpur by the Munda. He examined nine points of differences and similarities as well.

S.C. Roy published another book on *Oraon Religion and Customs* in the year 1928. This book was of a pioneering significance, as this was the first instance of a monographic study on the religious aspect of a tribe. This book exhibits a typological classification of the different festivals of the Oraon. This book also delineates the extensive, intensive and comprehensive account of each Oraon festival.

While doing voluminous work (1937) on Dudh, Dhelki and Hill Kharia, S.C. Roy described in detail about religious feasts and festivals of the Kharia. Different communal and family level festivals are illustrated in about 53 pages in the second volume of his book *The Kharias.* Roy, functionally classifies the festival observed by the Kharia into four classes - (1) Festivals connected with food gathering and hunting, (2) festivals connected with agriculture, (3) harvest festivals, and (4) festivals for safeguarding the village. All these four types of festivals had been described by him to a greater extent.

W.G. Archer in 1942 contributed a paper in *Man in India* in which he gave nine *SarhuI* and *Karma* poems together with several poems on marriages of Oraon.

J. Hoffmn and Emclen Von wrote a very descriptive account on Munda life of Chotanagpur. Their book *Encyclopedia Mundarica* (1950) runs into several volumes. As the name indicates, the encyclopedia covers the entire aspects of Munda life including the festivals.

Prof. D.N. Majumdar in his book *The Affairs of a Tribe* (1950) presented a list of 7 festivals observed in the Ho community of Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. These seven festivals are - Maghe, Baha, Damurai, Hero, Bahtauli, Jomnama and Kalam Karsa. Out of these seven festivals, he described in detail only Maghe festival.

In the *Journal of the Asiatic Society,* Science, G. Chattopadhyay contributed an article on the Jatra or Harmaghe festival (1956) observed by the Ho of Singhbhum every year. The author also presents a detailed picture of the Ho annual festival. In the same year, G. Chattopadhyay and B.C. Chaudhuri also wrote a paper in the same journal on Maghe festival of Saraikella area of Hos. The author in exhaustive detail has described the festival, which spreads over four days.

The paper by Surajit Sinha (1958) dealt with one aspect of Bhumij culture namely, the annual cycle of festivals. He observed the changes among the Bhumij (of South Manbhum) as compared with tribal Mundas of Ranchi. These changes were in extensions and diversification of territorial ties, formation of feudalized states and related social classes, multi-ethnic (or multi caste) interaction in social life and finally, the Bhumij accepting a more or less specific status in the regional hierarchy of Hindu caste.

Professor Vidyarthi (1961) edited a book *Aspects of Religion in Indian Society* in which several authors like K.N. Sahay and others highlighted on tribal festival in the context of Christianity. The editor himself presented a paper on "Sacred Complex of a Tribal village of Jharkhand".

Satya K. Ganguly did his fieldwork in a Munda village near Ranchi. He made a detailed study of Fagu fesival or *Phagu Sendra* (1962). He also illustrated about the sacrifices, prayers and other related rituals of this festival. He emphasized that importance of the *Phagu Sendra* lies in the belief that if a man takes part in it, the productivity of his land would increase. There is also a lure in it, as the young folks after returning from the Sendra are received most courteously and nursed by the village maidens.

Victor Rosner wrote a very interesting article on "Fire Walking" in *Anthropos* (1966). The author observed the Munda festival in two villages of Ranchi-Tupudana (Hatia P.S.) and Biguadag (Karra P.S.). Victor also presented a detailed description of the sacred swing, the prayers and sacrifices at the festivity. Again Budhadeb Chaudhuri expressed his reaction, through the same international journal *Anthropos* in 1967. He presented his paper in a very analytical way and opined that the study of festival and rites and rituals thus throws new light in understanding the cultural assimilation and cultural admixture.

Writing a paper about the Santhal's festivals. A.C. Sinha (1970) made an attempt to delineate the cycle of the communal festivals in the Santhal annual calendar. He collected data from two Santhal villages in Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand. The author presented a picture of the Santhal annual festivals and tried to delineate its implications as an avenue leading to an understanding of their life.

A.K.Singh (1977) wrote a paper on "Social Organisation of a Festival". His paper is based upon the observation and interviews at Gagar Sotia village of Tamar P.S. in Ranchi district. The Tusu festival is the most important festival of the tribes and lower caste people of the area of Panch Pargana of Ranchi district. Originally, the Hindus were celebrating the festival but gradually the tribals who are living in close contact with the Hindus shared the traits of this festival. This festival has a limited area of celebration like Purulia, Midnapur and Bankura districts of West Bengal, Panch Parganas in Ranchi, and Dalbhum of Singhbhum district in Jharkhand. The tribals who observe this festival are the Bhumij, the Chik Baraik, the Gond, the Karmali, the Kherwar, the Lohra, the Mahali, the Munda, the Oraon and the Santhal. The author projected the significance of the festival in four dimensions - political, family, social and economic organizations.

A.N. Sandhwar's book on *The Korwa of Palamau* (1978) presents an ethnographic detail on Korwa tribe of Jharkhand. The author contributed three chapters in his book on the festivals of the Korwas and mentioned about 12 types of festivals observed by them.

A book on the *Tribal Religion* has been published by J. Troisi (1979). Although Troisi focused his study on Santhal's religion, it is also based on an understanding of Santhal life as a whole. He studied the Santhal festivals in detail as well as the Hindu festivals, which are observed by the Santhal.

## OBSERVANCE OF AGRICULTURAL FESTIVALS

The tribal observe some rites and rituals at each and every stage of agricultural operation i.e. at the time of sowing, when the paddy shoots germinate, at the transplantation of paddy seedlings, at the time of eating new grain, when the rice grain forms in the stalk and finally at harvesting stage.

Before picking up the thread of discussion on each ritual of different tribe on the occasion of festival one should know that the ritual performances vary from one region to another, from tribe to tribeand even among one tribe.

## FESTIVAL AT THE TIME OF SOWING

### *Erok Sim: (Santhal)*

*Erok Sim* is a festival, which is observed by the Santhals on the occasion of sowing the winter paddy. This festival is observed to appease the various gods and receive their blessings for a bumper crop, good rains and to ward off disease, and evil influences and growth of cattle.

In the afternoon of the festival day the *naike* takes the purificatory bath and goes to *jaherthan* to sacrifice fowls. He is accompanied by the *kudam naike,* and some villagers. Facing towards east the *naike* offers one fowl each to *Jaher Bongas* and *Manjhi Haram* invoking them to make the earth fertile, to let the rains pour down, and to give them a bumper crop.

Meanwhile, the *kudam neike,* making a separate *khund* offers a black fowl by twisting its neck in the name of the Bahre and Sima Bongas. He also performs the *Bui Mayam* ceremony by mixing his own blood with the *adwa caole.* This sacrificial blood, believed to possess the greatest potency, is scattered over the place beseeching, all the *bongas* to keep off the harm's way. After this, he scorches the fowls for plucking on a small fire. The fowls are then rolled in flour and baked on the fire in a skin of leaves. The heads are cooked separately and the priest eats the flesh of the heads. The other villagers take the *surejel*(hash) made from the rest of the flesh. Rice-beer is served to everyone present. The fowls offered to *Jaher-Era* and Moreko-Turuiko are cooked separately and eaten only by the *naeke.* After the *neike* has conducted the *Erok-Sim,* other families of the village celebrate it according to their own convenience. The heads of families sacrifice fowls in honour of the *Abge Bongas,* the *Orak Bongas, Maran Burn* and the spirit of the dead ancestors. The festival is concluded by dancing and singing.

## DHAN BUNI (ORAON)

The Oraon's *Dhanbuni* is celebrated in the month of *Asarh* in a *tanrand* (instead of *sarna* as in the case of the Santhal). On the festival day, the *pahan, pujar* and other villagers go to a *tani* land and scrap some space which is then cow dunged. The *pahan* sits there facing east direction. Five *kuris* of *arwa* rice is made on the cleaned space and the legs of the five fowls (usually of five colours: black, white, copper cloured spotted and red) are washed with water. Then the fowls are allowed to eat rice from these *kuris* and in the meantime their heads are separated from their body with a sharp knife by the *pahan.* The blood of the fowls are then dropped on these *kuris.* These sacrifices are made in the name of the village gods and deities. Among the Oraon there is no ceremony like *Bul Mayam* as in Santhal.

On the family level in this festival about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning a male member of the Oraon family goes to his *don* land with some paddy seeds. In the way he does not talk to anybody or when he goes with his other mates the talking between them is strictly prohibited. Talking or a remark made by others proves a hindrance to a plentiful crop or a vigorous growth of the paddy plants. On reaching his paddy field (selected for the purpose) he then sprinkles the paddy seeds on a small piece of land. After scattering the seeds they return home silently. During the night when male goes to scatter paddy seeds in his field, he does not sleep with his wife. On the following morning before he goes to scatter the paddy seeds he feeds some *arua* rice in his house to a fowl which is set free to be sacrificed in *Kharihani Puja (Aghan).* After this ritual, the farmer goes to the field first on which paddy seeds were ceremonially sprinkled as mentioned above, ploughs it up and sows it again in the regular way and then again he proceeds to his other fields for sowing.

Among the Maler, before sowing the crops in the field, the head of the family sacrifices a goat or a fowl or a pigeon to please the *Gosain.* A *puja* is offered to *Gar Gosain* and *Chal Gosain* by the *Kotwar* on behalf of the village. A pig is sacrificed to the god for good crops.

## ORAH-BAKHRA (BIRJIA)

Almost all the Birjias perform the *Ojah Bakhra* at the family level when the head of the family collects sample of all seeds, to be sown in the field, in the *nachhua* (basket) and sacrifices a fowl in the name of all the family spirits invoking their blessing in a corner of the living apartment of the house near the seeds kept in the *nachhua*. The oozing blood is allowed to drop on the seeds and then these seeds mixed with blood are mixed with the seeds in the stock separately. Then the sacrificial meat is cooked by him and along with a *tapawan* is offered by him on the ground to the spirits. After that, rest of *tapawan* and the sacrificial meat is shared by all the male members of the family and the housewife. Here it may be inferred that the motive behind the sacrifice is to please and satisfy all the family or lineage spirits and again the motive behind allowing the oozing blood to drop on the seeds and then mixing it with the seeds is to potentiate the life and strength of the seeds to be sown in the field.

## FESTIVALS: WHEN THE PADDY SHOOTS HAVE JUST GERMINATED AND PUSHED OUT INTO NEW SHOOTS

### Hariari (Oraon)

When the paddy seeds pushed out into new shoots, the Oraon celebrate it with some rites. They celebrate their Hariari festival on this occasion. On the fixed date in between 9 to 11 a.m., the *pahan, pujar, gorait* and other villagers go to a *tanr* place where every year the festival is celebrated. Arriving at the place some space is scraped and then cleaned with water and cow dung. Near the cleaned place the sup and sacrificial knife is kept. Facing east the *pahan* sits near the cleaned and cow dunged place. From north to south direction a handful of *arua* rice is kept in a row at different spots locally called as *kuri* (the distance between the two spots are about 3 to 4 inches). All these kuris are placed in the names of a particular spirit. The *pujar* washes the hoofs of each votive animal, if any, the feet of fowls, applies vermilian on the forehead of the goat and hands over each animal to *pahan* one by one. The pahan holds each animal or fowl in pulms of his hands and prays each victim for health and good luck of men and cattle and for good rains and good crops. Then animals or fowls are fed some arua rice of the *kuri* meant for the purpose and return back to pujar one by one. Then again these fowls or the animals are given to pahan one by one for the sacarfice. The pahan again holds the fowls one by one for the sacrifice. The *pahan* again holds the fowls one by one in pulms of his hands and recites the prayer for the well-being of the village, families, cattle and crops. He then cuts off the head of each fowl or animal one after another and a little of the blood is dropped on the rice kuri on which the fowls were fed.

The livers of sacrificial animals or fowls are packed up in sal leaves and boiled in water by the pujar or other villagers. Some bits of the livers are scraped by the fingers and offered to the spirits by placing it near the rice *kuri*. Libation of rice-beer is also offered at the same time on each *kuri*. The *pahan* then bows down before the *kuris*. The rest boiled livers are eaten by the pahan and other villagers as sanctified. The other sacrificial meat is either fried or boiled with rice (Oraon calls it *tahri)* and is distributed among the villagers who are present there. The earthen pots in which the rice and meat were cooked, the stone of hearths and sal leaf cups and plates are buried underground by the pujar with the help of other villagers. No female member may eat the sacrificial food but only the young unmarried girls are allowed to eat it at the house and not at the *tanr* land where their gods and deities were worshipped. It may also be noted here that the appropriate colour of the fowl to be sacrificed to Dharmes is white, to sarna Burhis brown *(kasri)* to *Darha* red *(rangna)* to *Deswali (kasri)* and to Gairahi Khunt spirits mottled (mala), and to miscellaneous spirits any colour.

## Asarhi Puja (Birjia)

This is celebrated by the Birjia for good crop as well as to get healthy and abundant growth of edible products in the forest e.g. *khukhari, putu nakaoa, kanda* etc. Because during these days their physical survival is endangered for the lack of grains in their houses and eatables in the forests. This festival is also known as *Asadh Bata* or *Hariar Bata* and unlike the Oraons, the Birjia celebrate it at family level. In the morning all the heads of the family do it with a chicken sacrifice in the name of all the ancestral spirits, gods and deities in general and the *'Orah Bonga'* or *'Mua'* in particular with suitable prayer to them. Before the sacrifice is to be made the chicken is fed with rice on the ground and then the head of the chicken is struck to the ground instead of cutting it off by a knife. Then the Shirni and the sacrificial meat is cooked by the house-wife on the sacred hearth in the *orah-bhitar* itself but the head of the chicken is cooked by the head of the family himself in a leaf cup on the burning ember there. Again in a leaf cup separately the cooked head and a little sacrificial meat, a little *shirni* and *tapawan* are offered to the spirits and the gods. Then the remaining portions are shared by the male members of the house and the housewife.

### Hariarsim (Santhal)

On the occasion of transplantation of paddy seedling the Santhal celebrate *Hariar* Sim when sacrifices are offered to the village spirit so that the paddy may grow green or in other words for a luxuriant growth of the crops. On the night preceding the appointed day, the *naike* fasts and observes the usual taboos. In the morning, after taking the purificatory bath, he goes to the *jaherthan* carrying with him a winnowing fan (*hatak)* containing some flour, *adwa, caole, sindur,* some paddy seedlings and two fowls. He sacrifices, on behalf of the whole village, the fowls to the *bongas* of the village, namely. *Maran Buru, Jahr Era, Gosae Era, Moreko-Turuiko, Pargana Bonga, Manjhi Haram Bonga* and also to the *Sima Bongas.* On his return to home, he offers rice-beer to all the villagers who visit his house. Unless this public worship is performed, no one in the village may start transplanting the paddy seedlings.

## FESTIVALS: AT THE TIME OF PADDY SEEDLINGS TRANSPLANTATION

### Bangari (Oraon)

The Oraon call this paddy seedling transplantation festival as *Bangari.* It is usually observed at individual family level. At the time when the paddy seedling is ready for transplantation the cultivators invite the village *pahan.* The *pahan* and cultivator then proceeds towards the field taking a pot of rice-beer. After arriving at cultivator's field the *pahan* pours some rice-beer in the field. This pouring of rice-beer in the field is called *tapaon* to mother earth or *Dhartimai.* The pahan prays to *Dhartimai* for a bumper crops and plenty of rain. Five paddy seedlings are then planted by the pahan on the same spot where rice-beer was poured. The woman then starts transplanting the rest of the field. After this ceremonial transplantation the pahan goes to cultivator's house where he is given a dinner and rice-beer to his satisfaction.

## Batauli (Munda)

The Mundas call this transplantation rites as *Batauli*. The *pahan* who has been fasting since the day preceding, sacrifices fowls at the *jaher sarna* of his village, and with offerings of rice-beer, leaves of the *marua* plant *(marua-sag), gandhari sag,* and the sacrificed fowls, worships all the bongas or deities of the Mudas. The fowls are cooked and other food (boiled rice, sag etc.) is prepared at the *sarna* where all the Munda men of the village have a sumptuous feast. Finally, the pahan is taken home in state. Such of the villagers as go with the procession up to the pahan's house are there given rice-beer to drink.

## Hariari (Asur)

The Asur celebrate the Hariari festival in an open *tanr* land annually. The site for the sacrifice is cleaned and the sacrificial winnowing fan and knife are placed on the ground. *Arua* rice is placed in heaps by its side. After the fowls are made ready for the sacrifice, the priest holds each fowl and addresses the victim for the welfare of the village, children and cattle. After the fowl has picked up some rice grain it is sacrificed and a little of its blood is dropped on the ground. Then the meat is fried or boiled with rice and all have a hearty meal and plenty of drinks.

## Ropa- Puja (Birjia)

The *Ropa Puja* or *Rohaiyat Puja* of the Birjia is celebrated in a paddy field called *Sarnakiari* or *Kiari Sarna*. In the *Sarna kiarithe* Baiga on the priority fixed day comes in the morning with one or two chickens and a pot of *jhara* (local wine) for the worship. In a corner of the field the Baiga sacrifices the chickens and drops the wine in the name of all the suitable spirits and deities with making suitable prayers for the success of the paddy transplantation, protection of the crop and its good harvest and also for the welfare of all the villagers and then he jumps in the prepared field ready for the transplantation with five seedlings in his right hand when he starts transplantation. Then only, other people start transplantation. The Birhors call it *Soso Bonga* festival. It is also celebrated in the month of *Sraban* by the village priest in the paddy field.

## FESTIVALS: WHEN THE WINTER RICE GRAINS ARE FORMED IN STALK

### Kadleta (Oraon)

The next agricultural festival of the year is the *Kadleta.* When the rice grains have formed in the rice-plants standing in the *don* or low lands, and the *marua* (*eleurine coracana*) and *gora* or upland rice crops are waiting to be harvested, the agricultural communities especially Oraon and Dudh Kharia celebrate this festival. Usually the tenth day of the moon in the month of *Bhadra* is selected for the celebration of the Kadleta festival among the Oraon. On the festival day the *pahan, pujar* and other villagers go to a *tanr* land and offer sacrifices to different gods and deities. Libation of rice-beer is also offered to the different *rice-kuris.* The liver of the sacrificial fowl is cooked separately by the *pahan* a bit of which is offered to spirits and rest is eaten by the *pahan* and village elders as in *Hariari* festival. Like the *Hariari* a feast follows the festival and after the feast the livers etc. are buried underground.

### Kadleta (Dudh-Kharia)

Among the Dudh-Kharia the *Kadleta puja* is performed by the *kalo* at the village *jankoror sarna.* This is the time when the upland paddy *(gora)* is first harvested, and the wet paddy fields are green with transplanted paddy. As usual, the *kalo* and the pujar remain testing since the night preceding the *kadleta puja.* In the early morning, the *kalo* and the *pujar* arrive at the *sarna* with a winnowing basket, some new rice grains, *bhelwa* (Semicarpus anacardium) twigs, *Mahadeo jata* creepers, an axe and other necessary requirements for the ceremony. The villagers assemble there, each with a fowl, *keond* (*diosphyros tomentosa*) twigs and *bhelwa* (*semi-carpus anacardium*) branches. Then the *kalo* offers fowls to the *Khunt-Pat* in the *sarna.* Generally, at least twelve fowls are offered. He follows the same ritual as in the Jankor or *Phagu* festival and, when the ceremony is over, the kalo is carries on the shoulders of some one to his house. There the kalo's wife washes his feet with water. But he is not, as in the *Phagu* festival, carried from house to house, nor is the water sprinkled over his head.

Before the villagers depart from the *sarna,* each cultivator takes a little sanctified rice in a leaf-cup and plants one or more sanctified *keond*-twigs and *bhelwa* twigs in his fields to ward off mischief to the crops from the evil eye and other pests.

The first fruits of the harvest are regarded as sacred. Among the tribals, it is strictly taboo for anyone to eat of the first fruit until ceremonial rituals have been performed to the spirits on behalf of the whole village. The spirits are honoured by being offered the first fruits of the land. The ceremonial rituals performed are an acknowledgement of the spirits lordship over the land and crops.

The tribals do not gather the *sal* and *mahua* blossoms which provide thm with both food and drink, prior to the *Sarhul* or *Baha* festival being performed, They, then, offer the *gora* rice to the spirits in the month of *Bhadra* and again in *Aghan* when the *don* paddy is ready for eating.

## FESTIVALS: AT THE TIME OF EATING NEW GORA-RICE

### Janthar (Santhal)

*Janthar* or *Baihar-Horo Nawai* is celebrated by the Santhal in the month of *Aghan* when the low land winter paddy has ripened. A few days before the puja, the *godet* visits every house to collect money and to buy a goat or a ram to be offered in sacrifice. Early in the morning of the appointed day the *kudam naeke*, wearing a new *dhoti* given to him by the headman, goes to a field where the crop has ripened and takes some *horo gele* (ears of paddy) which he puts on the winnowing fan containing the other materials for sacrifice. The articles for worship, along with the rice for cooking the hash are supplied by the *kudam naeke* himself. Accompanied by the menfolk of the village, he goes to the *jaherthan,* stopping in front of the *sarjom* tree representing *Pargana Bonga.* After saluting the tree he prepares the *khond* in front of the stone at the foot of the tree. He then places the ears of paddy on the *khond* and puts *sindur* marks on them. He also applies *sindur* on the forehead of the ram and makes it eat of the adwa caole at the center of the *khond* uttering some invocation. The ram is then beheaded and the blood is allowed to drip on the *khond.* The ram is then cooked with rice and eaten by all the men present. The head of the sacrificed animal is taken by the *kudam naeke* to his house. Similar offerings of the first fruits to the Orak bongas and to the ancestors are made in every household. Once this festival is over, the taboo on the eating of winter paddy is lifted.

## Nawakhani (Oraon)

The Oraon's *Nawakhani* festival is celebrated in the month of *Bhadra* (no fixed date) when the tanr (up-land) paddy is ripe and ready for eating. The offering of the first fruits of the crops is made to the *Sarna Burhis* or *Chalo Pachcho.* On the festival day, the *pahan* and the *pujar* go early in the morning to a paddy tanr land (upland) in a neighbouring village. From that paddy field they collect about two *seers* of paddy. The owner of the land is told before hand about the happening so that he may not use bad words for taking some paddy from his field. The *pahan* or *pujar* gives this paddy to his wife for making *chiura.* When the *chiura* is prepared by her the *pahan* invites the villagers to his house. Then the *pahan* purifies himself with water and takes the *chiura* to the room in his house where the winnowing-basket sacred to the village goddess known as Sarna-burhia is hung up. He offers the *chiura* to the goddess and distributes it among the villagers in the form of sanctified who represent at his house. The *pahan* also entertains them with rice- beer and some food. When the village level Nawakhani is over, the other villagers celebrate it in their individual houses according to their own conveniences. *Chiura* made of new up-land paddy is eaten and rice-beer is drunk by the villagers.

The *Jom Nawa* of the Mundas is not a religious festival, nor is it observed by the Mundas in general. It is only in some localities that the Mundas have adopted the Hindu custom of celebrating with certain ceremonies the eating of the new rice in the month of *Bhadra* or *Aswin* or, sometimes, even later. Chiura made of new rice is eaten with milk or curds and molasses. Rice-beer is, of course, freely drunk. The pahan and some villagers sacrifice each a fowl in their own houses.

## Nawakhani (Birjia)

The nature and time of worship among various tribes of Jharkhand vary from one ecological setting to the other. *Nawakhani* is a festival celebrated by the Birjia in the month of *Bhadra* when they start getting abundant food grains from their field and various roots and fruits from the forests. Therefore the jubilant Birjia celebrate this festival as a welcome gesture to the new crop with the consumption of rice-beer and feasting of new grain.

Among the Birjias, it is a family worship done by all the family heads in their own *orah-bhitar* with a chicken sacrifice in the name of all the family or lineage spirits. The housewife prepares '*shirni*' of newly obtained rice of '*gondli*' or even '*gora*' paddy or '*jhinor*' (maize) and evokes the sacrificial meat. Then the family head offers a portion of cooked sacrificial meat and head of the chicken, the 'shirni' and the '*tapawan*' separately in a leaf cup to all the ancestral spirits and deities and invokes their blessings with suitable prayers for the welfare of the family or lineage members. All the remaining sacrificial meat '*shirni*'' and the '*tapawan*' are then shared by the male members of the family or lineage but not at all by the females except the house wife.

### Dhan Nawakhani (Korwa)

Among the Korwas, the *Dhan Nawakhani* is celebrated at family level by those who cultivate paddy. On Tuesday or Wednesday inside the house, the sacred place is cleaned and cow dunged, *dhup* is burnt and *chiura* is offered in the name of different ancestors by the household head. If *chengna* is available it is sacrificed and offered to the ancestors. The *chiura* is not eaten by anyone and is kept separately. It is their belief that if anybody eats it, one will be affected by a ghost in the form of fever. The Birhors who are settled also celebrate *Nawa Jom* on the morning following the Soso-Bonga festival. The worship is done at family level by the head of the family.

## FESTIVALS: AT THE TIME OF HARVESTING

### Sohrae (Santhal)

This is a six-day harvest festival celebrated by the Santhal, each day having a distinctive name to indicate the proceedings of the particular day. Among other things, the Sohrae includes the blessings, and baiting of cattle, a fishing expedition, and a village hunt. The festival is held in the month of *Pous* and *Magh* after the paddy has been reaped, threshed and stored.

Every household prepares rice-beer and the godet collects from every house sacrificial offerings which consist of a fowl, half a seer of rice, some onions, pepper ,salt and turmeric, on the eve of the *Urn Hilok* (bathing day) or the first day. On this day, the villagers take a purificatory bath and clean their houses and courtyards.

Later, *Got Puja* is performed in the afternoon at *got tandi* - a rice field beyond the village houses. Here the priest is accompanied by the *kudam naeke,* the godet and a number of male members of the village. Here the priest prepares the *khond,* puts some *adwa caole* heaps in the *khond* and makes five *sindur* marks in front of each. The odd number of marks is considered an ominous sign. He places an egg in the centre of the *khond* which he also marks with *sindur.* He then marks the fowl with a *sindur* and makes it partake of the rice. Meanwhile, he addresses the major *bongas* asking them to bless the village and to keep it free from any harm. Thereupon, he saws off the fowls head with a sickle or axe, letting the blood drip on the egg and rice heaps. He also places the fowl's head on the *khond*. The same is done with all the fowls collected from the village. The *naeke* then fills three leaf cups with rice-beer, which he pours over the *khond*, repeating the same invocation as before. Then, the people present drink *handia*. Meanwhile, the *kudam naeke* performs the *Bui Mayam* ceremony as described earlier in *Erok Sim* festival.

The cow also plays an important role in this celebration. On the same day the *gupies* (cow heard boys) of the village are invited to drive their cattle to the khond to the drumming of the *tamak* and the *tumdak*. This is known as the *got lavet* (trial of luck) ceremony. The cow which treads on and breaks the egg in the centre of the *khond* is caught. Her feet are washed and after anointing her horns with oil they are smeared with *sindur*. The Santhal believe that the owner of the cow is assured of good fortune for the following year. It is the luckiest possible omen to befall a person. The breaking of the teeth and the mouth of the evil powers thus depriving them of their nefarious potencies. The victorious *gupi* is carried over the godet's shoulders for everyone to see.

The same day in the evening worship is performed to make the cows fruitful and to protect them from fatal diseases and witchcraft. The young men of the village and the girls perform the "waking the cattle" and the *Camura* or "blessing of the cows" ceremonies respectively. The ceremonies are conducted with *adwa caole, dhubi ghas* and a lighted lamp. The ceremony starts from the manjhi's cowshed, adwa caole and dhubi ghas are thrown towards the cows and the cattle shed pronouncing the blessing. The cattle are garlanded and oil is rubbed on their horns which are also smeared with vermilion.

During *Daka Helok* or the food day, the second days of the festival sacrifices are offered by the heads of the families to *Maran Burn*, the *Orak-Bongas* and the ancestor. There is slight difference in the way of offering to the *Maran Burn* and *Orak Bongas* and to the ancestors. In the first case, after the bath, the fowls are decapitated, and blood is dripped on the *khond* whereas in the second case the fowls are killed by a blow on the back of the neck without blood being shed. Rice-beer libations are also offered to all the spirits. The flesh of sacrificed fowls are cooked separately and are eaten with the rice. From this day onwards till the penultimate days the Sohrae is spent by the Santhals in almost secular activities.

On the *Sakrat,* the last day of the festival, the Santhals go deep inside forest for hunting. On their return from the hunt, the men folk bathe and then offer rice-beer libations to the ancestors and to *Maran Burn.* The *naeke,* on behalf of the headman, offers rice- beer libations to *Manjhi Haram* at the *manjhithan.* In the afternoon, everybody gathers in an open field at the end of the *Kulhi* for the Birjia or archery competition. The *naeke* helped by the *kudam naeke* fixes the plantain stump (collected from the forest) in the ground. The *naeke* makes a khond around the stump and marks it with vermilion. He also puts three *sindur* marks on the stump. Then he labiates the spirits with three leaf cups full of *handi.* Some flour cakes *(pitha)* are put on the stump. The festival terminates with drinking, singing and dancing.

## Kharihani Puja (Oraon)

On the appointed day of the *Kharihani Puja* of the Oraons, the village *pahan* along with other villagers goes in a procession to a *tanr* land. They take with them the *arua* rice, fowls (collected from village), vermilion, water and rice-beer. Some space on the tanr land is then scraped and cow dunged. The *pahan* sits there facing east direction and makes five kuris of *arua* rice. Then the fowls of different colours (except the white one) are allowed to eat the rice from these *kuris* arranged at the cleaned cow dunged space. In the meantime, the *pahan* cuts the head of these fowls one by one with his knife. The trunks of the fowls sacrificed to the principal gods and spirits are caught hold of by their legs together and their blood is dropped three times on each *rice-kuri.* After washing the knife the *pahan* proceeds to cut the head of the white fowls, the blood of which is offered to the *rice-kuri* which is placed southern most and meant for *Dharmes.* The libation of rice-beer is made before each kuri except that meant for Dharmes to whom libation of pure water is offered. The sacrificed fowls are cooked separately and the flesh of the neck is also fried separately. The bits of fried flesh of the neck is scraped by nail (by pahan) and offered near the hearth. This neck flesh is then distributed among the present people in the form of sanctified. The rest fowls are boiled with rice and them eaten by the people. The people also take rice-beer brought by them.

This festival is also observed at family level and fowls are sacrificed in the name of *khunt* spirit and ancestor spirit. The beheaded fowls are then thrown on the paddy laid out for threshing in the *khalihan.* On this day, some paddy is threshed and the festival terminates with feasting and drinking.

## Maghe Porab (Munda)

The *Maghe Porab* of the Munda is celebrated on the day of the full moon in the month of *Pous.* The Mundas call the month of *Pous* by the name of Mage. The spirits of the deceased ancestors - the household gods of the Munda - are the main objects of worship at this festival. Now that the Munda household has garnered his winter harvest and is happy in abundance of grain and liquor, he turns with gratitude to his gods, and after having fasted the previous day and performed ablutions, he offers up prayers to his household deities (Orabongako) at the adding or sacred tabernacle of his house.

## Gangi - Pijje (Maler)

Among the Maler (shifting - cultivators) the pattern of worship that occurs on the eve of harvesting operation is more or less the same though in detail it may vary from one region to the other in Paharia areas. A Maler on the occasion performs worship known as *Gangi Pijje* (maize worship) and *Khosre Pijje* (bean worship). These two ritualistic performance associated with families are observed firstly on village level, and then on individual family level. In some villages, each individual family makes the sacrifices only. These two Pijje (worships) are observed at an interval of one or two months when the respective crops of maize and beans are ready for harvesting. Where these Pijje are observed on village level, the village *Gossaiyan* like *Chal Gossaiyan, Keklani Gossaiyan* and *Janglani Gossaiyan* are worshipped and the village sacred specialists make sacrifices.

The ritualistic performances comprise mainly of the sacrifice of hens at each sacred center. Sometimes pig or calf is also sacrificed. After the sacrifice is over, the offerings i.e. the most of the hens are cooked by the village *gurait* and all attending the ceremony share it. Once this *Gangi Pijje* is performed on the village level, the other members of the family now become free to observe *Gangi Pijje* in their respective *khallu* land before reaping the crops. The sacrifice at the different *khallu* land is made in proportion to the kindness shown by the *Gossaiyan* in shape of the extent of yield. Some sacrifices a hen, another goat, and still another pig.

In the month of *Magh* and *Fagun* about three months after the reaping of the maize and its worship, the Maler again observe a composite ritualistic performance popularly known as Khosre Pijje or the worship of the beans.

## Kharwaij (Asur)

The *Kharwaij* or *Kharuj* or *Deothan* of the Asurs is held preferably in the month of *Pous*. On this occasion villagers from different hamlets gather at a particular spot which traditionally is a center for the worship of *Kharwaij*. At the beginning only the elderly persons are present and gradually people come from the nearby villages.

The *Baiga* who sits facing the east first clears a small area, slightly more than a foot in diameter, with the help of small axe (*tangia*). A circle is then marked (about a foot in diameter) by means of rice powder (*holong*). *Arua* rice (*adua* chauli) is scattered in small quantities on the *holong* all along the circle.

A small heap of *arua-nce* is placed inside the circle. At the start of the worship the Baiga takes in his hand one chicken and then washes its neck with water taken from a brass vessel. The Baiga then makes recitations and urges the chicken to eat some rice grains from inside the circle, by touching its beak to the heap. When the chicken takes one or two grains it is sacrificed by splitting the neck open with a small knife and the blood is let to drop on the rice powder on the circle.

The first incantations are said in the name of *Suraj Deota* and the sacrifice of a white chicken is made by the Baiga in the honour of the deity. While saying the prayers and making the sacrifice the Baiga from time to time looks up at the sun. The second sacrifice that of a black chicken is made in the name of *Dhartimai* after the saying of the prayers is over.

Thus, in the name of all the spirits supposed to inhabit the various sacred spots, one chicken is sacrificed. When it is noticed that the number of chickens brought by the villagers is not large, one chicken is sacrificed sometimes in the names of two or sometimes in the names of three such godlings or spirits. The same process of moistening the legs and necks of the fowls with water and urging them to eat rice are followed by the Baiga before making the sacrifices, while all throughout the spirits concerned are propitiated to offer blessings for the well-being of all the villagers and their cattle, and also seeking supernatural help for luxuriant growth of crops in the following year. Although the Baiga conducts the ritual by saying the prayers, other elderly persons also join in the recitations that are done in *sadri*.

The chickens which are sacrificed in the names of dead ancestors are not killed in the usual manner with the knife. These are urged to take rice from the winnowing fan of the Baiga and then are killed by the latter by giving blows on their heads with the fist of his right hand.

The dead chickens are dumped all along the circle. The Baiga then takes some rice-beer in a leaf cup and pours a srnall quantity on them. While pouring rice-beer Baiga mentions the names of all the sacred centres of the village and its surrounding areas, and also the resident spirits, urging them all throughout to offer blessings and protect the *chua putan* (sons and daughter- in- law), *bal- bachha* (children), *gai- bachhur* (cows and calves, meaning cattle, etc.). Small pieces of bread made from rice-flour *(laad)* are also thrown at the sacrificed birds.

Some twenty feet away from the Baiga, towards his right, the *dehri* of the village is also performing worship in the names of *Suraj Deota* and *Dhartimai* separately, and making sacrifices. The *dehri* however, does not make any circle as the *Baiga* does; instead he keeps a small heap of *arua* rice in front of him. The *dehri* through his recitations seeks the blessings of Dhartimai, Suraj Deota, Duaria Deota, Devimai and Kalimai for the well being of the villagers and the domestic animals, and for their protection from tigers, snakes and other animals and also from storm, hailstorm and such other natural calamities, offerings of rice-beer are made in the name of *Dhartimai* and *Suraj Deota* by first cupping the hand and taking rice-beer in it.

Four chickens are sacrificed in all by the *dehri:* a white chicken *(sarka)* in the name of the sun, a black in the name of the earth, a mottled chicken *(mala)* in the name of Duaria and grey chicken (*kasri*) in the name of *Devimai* and *Kalimai*. At the end the *dehri* stands up, takes the sacrificed chickens in his hand and recites in *sadri*:

*rakat bhailak mitha,*
*mas bhailak sitha,*
*chil kowa khai*
*tekar tandarut nai hai.*

The Baiga undergoes fast as part of his religious duty from the preceding night till the worship is over by noon. He breaks fast by taking rice-flour breads. The people who are present there at the place of worship share the millet beer and go on chatting leisurely throughout the whole afternoon.

Late in the evening the Baiga is carried from the place of worship *(puja- thaon)* by the *suari/susari*, the vice - *Baiga*, on his shoulders. The other persons follow them. At the Baigas house the feet of the Baiga and *suari* are anointed with mustard oil and washed (*jang abun*) with water.

All the assembled persons at the *Baiga's* house are treated to drinks made from gondii, which is supplied by the Baiga's household. Once the religious rites are performed, the secular celebrations, which are the more conspicuous parts of the religious festival, begin.

## Tribal Festivals: A Functional Analysis

A festival cannot be fully understood in isolation from society. Any study of festival must begin by observing and describing belief systems and behaviour patterns, but these data will become significant only when they are related to their social meanings and functions.

The study of functions in the social sciences is the study of the social consequences of an institution. Several nineteenth century scholars like Fazer, Weber, Tylor and Durkhim imagined that the mentality of "primitive men" was such that they gave to all activities, experiences and observations a supernatural interpretation. Modern anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski have found however that all societies have secular areas that are not considered to be under supernatural jurisdiction.

British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 181) said that each of the separate features of social life has a function which contributes to the maintenance of structural continuity and thus to the coherence and perpetuation of the society as a whole. Like the human body, each society possesses a degree of functional unity because all parts of the system work together without producing persistent conflicts. Malinowski's concept of function is some-what different from that of Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe- Brown uses the term function primarily in its biological sense, as that which contributed to life. For Malinowski function was more often equated with purpose. While Radcliffe-Brown saw social institutions mainly as parts contributing to the whole, Malinowski (1960: 75) considered society as something that can survive only if its basic needs are fulfilled. In an organism, nutrition, breathing and excretion aid survival, but in a social system it is culture itself that is essential to life, culture is a specifically human form of biological adjustment. Family organization is, in this view, a cultural response to the basic biological and social need for reproduction, while the building of shelters answers the need for physical protection.

Thus, the study of functions is defined as the study of social consequences and the social institutions, whatever they may be, are always beneficial for every member of a society. The functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski may also be implied while studying the tribal festivals. From the definition of the festivals, as mentioned in introduction, it is obvious that it fulfills or satisfies some needs of the individuals and of the community as well. In the foregoing pages we will examine as to how the observance of the festivals by the tribals plays an important role in each aspect of tribal life - economy, social, political, religious, psychological and other different aspects of culture.

The economy of the most of the tribes of Jharkhand revolves around agriculture. Agriculture has been practiced by the tribal groups of Jharkhand at least since the day they migrated to their present habitat. Festivals are for security and prosperity to the tribal communities at each stage in the annual round of their economic life, and to express their rejoicing at the safe and successful termination of each such stage. Almost all the tribes before sowing their fields, before harvesting of the new crops, before threshing of new paddy and at the time of eating the new rice, celebrate a number of festivals. The names of these festivals may vary from one tribe to another and from one region to another, too.

On the occasion of sowing the winter paddy in the month of *Asarh* the Santhals celebrate a festival called Erok Sim. The Dhanbuni Puja (paddy sowing festival) of the Oraon is celebrated in the month of *Baisakh* and then in *Asarh.* When the monsoon breaks in the month of *Jaistha* the Birjias celebrate Oreah Bakhra (sowing ceremony). On this sowing occasion fowls are offered to the concerned deities to make the earth fertile, to let the rains come down and to give them a bumper crop. The spirits are also implored toward off any disease and evil influences and to let the cattle increase in number. No one dares to sow his field before observing the sowing festival. The tribals believe that he who does so, will bring ruin not only upon himself but also upon the whole village. They are, therefore, more careful to see to it that nobody breaks this custom and displeases the spirits.

When the paddy seeds germinate and push out into new shoots, the *Hariari* and *Asadhi Puja* is celebrated by the Oraon and Birjia, respectively. The Hariari or the festival of green plants is celebrated in the month of *Asarh* after paddy, gondii, marua and kapas or cotton seeds have been sown in all the fields of the village, and the land is green with verdure. Unless the Hariari is celebrated, no one in the village may transplant his fields. While sacrificing the animals, the Oraon pahan prays to gods and deities as follows:

> Look I am doing Hariari to you, See that no sickness or other trouble enter the village or visit its houses, affect its people, its children, its cattle and its luck. You are the *malik* (owner) of the village; should any disease or calamity seek entrance into the village, do not then admit them, but do that makes them deviate their course. May all in the village remain in peace and happiness. Please bring sufficient rain; may we have a bumper crop.

It is evident from the [prayer as to how a tribal sacred specialist requests the supernatural for his blessings. At the time of transplantation of the paddy seedlings generally in the month of *Sraban,* the tribals celebrate a festival called *Hariar Sim* (Santhal), *Bangari* (Oraon), *Batauli* (Munda), *Rohayat* (Birjia) and *Soso-bonga* (Birhor). On this occasion, the tribals offer sacrifices to the village spirits so that the paddy may grow green i.e. for a luxuriant growth of paddy.

It is an accepted fact that the first fruits of the harvest are regarded as sacred. Durkheim (1967: 379) opined that "by their very aspect the first fruits of the harvest manifest the energy which they contain". Among the tribes it is strictly taboo for anyone to eat the first fruits until ceremonial rituals have been performed to the spirits on behalf of the whole village. The Santhals celebrate this festival called as *Janthar,* Oraons and Birjia as *Nawakhani,* Munda as *Jom Nawa,* Korwa as *Dhan Nawakhani* and Birhor as *Nawajom* etc. On the occasion of this festival, the Santhals according to Troisi (1978: 139) prays to god not to let them suffer from any stomach trouble while eating it, multiply the paddy at the time of harvesting and threshing and to protect the crop from rats or other pestilence.

The final festival related to agriculture is the harvest festival, which is the principal and most important public event among the tribes of Jharkhand. Every year this festival returns with freshness when the paddy has been reaped, threshed and stored. They observe this festival at the end of agricultural cycle for giving thanks to their gods and deities who gave them the good crop. Different tribal groups call the name of harvest festival differently, i.e., *Sohrae* (Santhal), *Kharihani* (Oraon), *Maghe* (Munda), *Khosre bijje* (Maler), and *Kharwaj* (Birjias). The Munda household head recites the following prayer while worshipping *Orabongako* on the occasion of *Mage porab:*

> May we all, young and old, keep well in mind and in body. May our cattle thrive. May neither tigers attack us, nor stubs and stumps of trees nor thorns hurt us when we enter the *jungles* to gather wood for fuel. May we not fall down into pits in the *jungles.* May we go about our work in health. May we have plenty to eat and drink. May we have enough to entertain our relatives and friends.

The cattle wealth is closely connected with agriculture and no one can think of agriculture without them. Almost all the agricultural tribes of Jharkhand celebrate Sohrae festival for the well-being of their cows, oxen, buffaloes etc. On the evening of 15th *Kartik* this Sohrae festival is observed by the larger number of tribes of Jharkhand. This Sohrae festival is borrowed by the tribes from their Hindu neighbours specially from the Gwalas. Earthen *diyas* (lamp) are also lighted on the occasion like the Hindus.

Although hunting has, for a long time, been substituted by agriculture as the principal mode of living, the tribals still take an intense delight in hunting. Nothing pleases them more than going after game with bows and arrows. They also use hunting spears and axes. The Santhal's *Disom Sendra* is the most important hunting occasion which takes place during the month of *Falgoon* after the Baha festival. The Santhals annual hunt priest called *dihri* is chosen because of his knowledge of the appropriate sacrifice and the incantations uttered to the *bongas* of the forest and hunt so as to assure the success of the hunt and to ward off any harm befalling the hunters.

The tribals believe that all the products of nature, such as grain, fruits, domestic animals etc., were created by god and so in principle belonged to him. So the first fruit either of the agriculture product or the forest product must be offered to god before human consumption. When the *sal* (*shorea robusta*) and the *mahua* (*bassia latifolia*) trees begin to blossom most of the tribes of Jharkhand celebrate a great festival - *Sarhul* or *Baha* or *Ba* in the month of *Falgoon*. Not a single person of a tribal village may gather, eat or use the new fruits' flowers and edible leaves of the season, until the Sarhul is not celebrated in the village.

A festival called *Hariar Bata* is celebrated by the Birjias in the month of *Asarh*. This festival is observed to get healthy and abundant growth of edible products from the forest i.e. kanda, putu, khukhari, nakaoa etc. because during these days nothing is left in their houses and the forest as well to subsist on due to which their physical survival is endangered.

Thus, we see how every aspect of economic activity of the tribal life revolves round rituaf performances. A tribal cannot sow the seeds, cannot transplant the paddy seedlings, cannot harvest the crops, cannot even eat the new grains and cannot do his traditional industrial work unless he propitiates his concerned gods. Above all, a festival has a functional value in tribal way of life. The other functional aspects of the tribal festivals are that in collective feasting, drinking, singing, dancing, mutual visits and exchange of gifts, the idea of community solidarity is expressed. The males and females, young and old and even the whole village, join in these manifestations of joy and exaltation. Each individual member of a tribe is aware of his fellowship with his community. He experiences and expresses his joy and exaltation not merely as an individual but as a member of a community. These festivals are also occasions for the reunion of relatives and friend. During some tribal festivals, the code of sexual conduct is deliberately relaxed and the tribals indulge themselves in a veritable saturnalia of sexual licence. Thus, a few festivals like *Sohrae* of Santhals, *Maghe* of Hos and *Kharwaij* of Asurs etc. provide an opportunity to the young to satisfy their sexual urge. Marriage negotiations are also conducted during the festivals as a large number of relatives and friends are entertained during the auspicious occasion. The secular aspect of a tribal festival provides the pleasure and satisfaction that it brings to the participant, whether through relaxation, refreshment of strength after toil, renewal of spirit, the opportunity for self expression, relief from boredom release of emotional tension, the provision of an outlet for repressed impulses, the testing of one's powers, the attainment of a sense of achievement, the forgetting of one's worries, sheer fun or the mere strengthening of the ego that comes from feelings of adequacy and self- esteem.

It has been often said that fear is the father of religion. Mary Douglas (1966: 13) points out that one of the peculiarities, which made the nineteenth century sociologists and anthropologists separate primitive religion as a group from the great world religions, was precisely the fact that the former were inspired by fear.

Evidently from the above discussion, there are many reciprocal relationships between festival and economy. Economic activities are basic to the survival of a community, and it is to be expected that all societies attach great importance to economic undertakings and often reinforce them by religious definitions and sanctions.

On the one hand, it is certainly true that cultural institutions, including festivals, have both functional and dysfunctional aspects. On the other hand, there is good reason to believe that the positive aspects of festival generally outweigh its negative effects. Cultural institutions are established and maintained in order to serve human needs. Sustained failure to meet these needs would lead to institutional and ideological change, or to the extinction of the group.

The central theme of observing the festivals among all the tribes of Jharkhand is to seek help from the supernatural for their survival. As most of the tribes live in the lap of the nature, their fate depends upon the mercy of nature. It is evident from their simple language of prayer that they demand from the unseen forces for the abundance of food crops, for the welfare of the men and livestock, and for the avoidance of evil spirits and sickness in men.

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# Socio-Cultural Life of the Borok People of Tripura

## INTRODUCTION

The Boroks are the aborigines of Tripura.[1] They are also known as Tipra, Twiprasa, Tipperah and Tripuri. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a renowned historian, referred to them as the Tipperah or 'Southern Bodos'.[2] Borok community comprises nine different sub-tribes, namely Bru (Reang), Debbarma, Jamatia. Koloy. Murasing, Noatia, Rupini, Tripura and Uchoi. Kokborok is their mother tongue, a dialect of the Tibeto-Burman languages. In the narrow sense of the term 'Borok', the Kokborok-speaking people call themselves Borok, and in its wider sense they also consider all other indigenous tribal people[3] of Tripura as Borok or 'Hani Bwsa" meaning indigenous people of the land. They have been settling in the North-eastern region of India, in some other parts of India, and also in Bangladesh and Myanmar since time immemorial. They have close affinity to the Bodo/Boro people of Assam. They are part and parcel of the great Boro/Bodo family, which is a branch of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongoloid race. They bear the common features of a Mongolian. Generally they are of medium height and well-built stature. They have flat nose, small eyes, black-spiky hair and high cheekbones. Their skin colour is yellowish brown. By nature their behaviour is very simple and amiable, ever ready to befriend even with a stranger. They are the dominant indigenous tribal community presently sharing about 80% of the total tribal population of Tripura. The Tipras constitute the largest tribe.[4]

The historical background of Tripura is very clear from the chronicle of Tripura. According to the '*Sri Raj mala*' or '*Bubagra Khumtrang*' (Chronicle) of Tripura 184 Tipra kings ruled the princely Tripura State prior to its Merger Agreement with Indian Union (15th October, 1949). The chronicle of Twipra was narrated by a Tipra priest named Durlobendra Chontai and later translated in Bengali by Kali Prasanna Sen. "The Mahabharata though overladen with fables forms the epic chronicle of the kings of the Middle land celebrates the Lunar Race of Hastinapura. The Kings of Tripura claimed to be descent from the Lunar lines of Kings. Many of the mythological tales of the Mahabharata are of Vedic antiquity, and even a conservative calculation would assign the period of Druhyu to Tripura to not less than 1367 B.C. as Tripur was a contemporary of Yuthisthira".[5]

The chronicle also mentions that the 112th Maharaja Jujarupha (Hamtorpha) introduced Tring or Twipra Era, in 590 A.D. to commemorate the historical event of war victory over some parts (Murshidabad, Rangpur, Dakka, Maimonsingh, Rangamati etc.) of Bengal.[6] Every year the Borok people celebrate the new year day of their historical, social, cultural and traditional era known as Tring or Twipra Era, on 22nd December with colourful programmes throughout Tripura and outside of Tripura. Tring fair is also held at different parts of Twipra. The present Ujjayanta Palace built (between 1899 & 1901) during the reign of Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya Bahadur (1896-1909) of Tripura, located in the heart of the capital town Agartala, was used as Tripura Legislative Assembly for many years. There are many such palaces / castles built by the Tipra kings - Old Palace at Udaipur, Palace at Old Agartala, Neermahal Palace at Melaghar, Tripura Castle at Shillong, etc.

The indigenous tribal people formed absolute majority in their ancestral land – Tripura. But due to the unprecedented inflow of 'alien' people into the region, they are now a minority in their own homeland. This state of affairs of demographic profile of Tripura has brought about a tremendous impact on the socio-cultural and other spheres of lives of the indigenous tribal people of Tripura. This has also threatened the very existence of the socio-cultural and religious lives of the Borok people in their own land. As a result of the dominion of the 'other people" on the natives, a group of Borok youths have taken up arms for freedom from exploitation and suppression demanding their constitutional rights. Today, this seems to be a serious problem in Tripura.

The socio-cultural institutions of any society are 'those patterned sets of positions, relations and activities involved in biological reproduction, socialization and enculturation, production and distribution of goods and services, and the maintenance of order. The total network of all the social institutions and the connections among them constitutes the core social structure or social organization of the society'.[7] The indigenous tribal people have their own social structure, which are closely-knit and self-contained units. As they form a community of their own in a particular territory, their relations are direct and intimate. Andre Beteille, therefore, says that 'the tribal communities are small, isolated self-sufficient and autonomous.'[8] Social structure indicates an ordered arrangement of parts, which can be treated as transposable, being relatively invariant, while the parts themselves are variable.[9]

Social scientists maintain that culture is a system oflearned behaviour acquired by a person as a member of society. Culture is shared when a group of people accepts it and organizes their lives according to it. Forde says, "Culture intervenes as a middle term between the physical environment and human activity."[10] Culture is a distinct terminology, which possesses its root at all levels of human existence. It is the total repertoire of human action and its product socially as opposed to genetically transmitted and, as such, was the exclusive preservation of man. While the culture per se signifies the total social heritage of mankind, a culture signifies the social heritage of a particular people. In 1874, the father of modern anthropology, E.B. Taylor stated that culture is that "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[11] So, it can be said that an individual born in a particular community learns life-style of his/her own people.

The traditional view of culture emphasizes that in human societies, the so-called beliefs, customs, arts, knowledge and opinion are all handed down from the older generation to the younger generations. On the other hand, the modern use of the concept of culture from the late 18th century onwards, is worth noting for the understanding of the true meaning of culture. The concept has been used in four different ways: (a) as "a general state or habit of the mind" with close relation to the idea of human perfection, (b) as "a general state of intellectual and moral development in a society as a whole", (c) as "the general body of the arts and intellectual work" and (d) as "the whole way of life", material, intellectual, and spiritual of a given society".[12] Thus, culture involves various kinds of development aiming at human perfection, accomplishment, refinement and self-realization and in a word, changes to a higher quality.

Mention may be made here that socio-cultural life of a community is a phenomenon which deals with an answer to the philosophical question concerning the purpose and significance of socio-cultural life or existence in human society. Why is social and cultural life for us? Can't we live without society and culture? These questions are philosophical questions about the socio-cultural life of a community. In fact, socio-cultural life of a community is deeply entrenched in the philosophical and religious conceptions of existence, social ties, consciousness, and happiness, and borders on many other issues, such as symbolic meaning, ontology, value, purpose, ethics, good and evil, free will, conceptions of God, the existence of God, the soul, and the afterlife of the community. Socio-cultural life is a tradition of any human community. But due to different reasons it is now subject to various changes in the present era.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF THE BOROKS OF TRIPURA

Borok people have a distinct socio-cultural life of their own. The family, kinship, occupational pattern, socio-political institution, dress and ornaments - which comprise distinctive fields of social interaction, constitute the structural realties of the Boroks of Tripura. But like many other communities the traditional socio-cultural life of the Borok community is currently in a state of flux. They seem, in this process, to be confronted with a bewildering phenomenon common to the people of the developing nations—the co-existence and interaction of two very powerful cultural currents—namely,—tradition and the modern. Traditional culture itself is anything but homogenous, containing as it does varied and conflicting tendencies - the Orthodox and the Heterodox, the indigenous and the exogenous.

The sustenance of the Borok society is based on the participation of the individual members of the society in various community lives forming a socio-cultural life thereof. The notion of socio-cultural life of the Borok community is also associated with certain beliefs, ideas, knowledge, values, ideals, attitudes, rituals, customs, aesthetic appreciations, music, arts, myths, symbols, architectures, language, food habits, clothing, housing and manner etc. In the present study, many social and cultural elements such as family, kinship, avoidance, joking relationship, rites of passage, customs of inheritance, language, shifting cultivation, dances, songs, music, dresses and ornaments, festivals, morality, etc. have been taken up to elucidate the socio-cultural life of the Borok people. Both traditional and modern socio-cultural life of the Borok people can be explicated with the help of the following social and cultural elements:

**(1) Family:** Family is the basic foundation of the socio-cultural life of the Borok community. "The family is a social group" Murdock writes, "characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually inhabiting adults."[13] The family, as a social unit, thus, minimally consists of a married couple and the children that the couple may have. The family is the first form of association, lowest in the chain of social evolution, and lowest in the rung of values, because it is established by nature, as Aristotle says, "for the supply of men's everyday wants."[14] A Borok family usually consists of a man and his wife and their children. It is traditionally based on monogamous marriage. It is a patrilocal, patriarchal, patrilineal and patronymic family. The eldest male member is the nuclei of authority in the Borok family. His decisions in all matters – domestic, social, religious and political are obeyed by all members of the family. Based on composition, the Borok family may be either matrilocal – composed of mother and the children, or a nuclear family – composed of father, mother and child, or a joint family – composed of a few nuclear families (of close blood ties), or an extended family – composed of nuclear family and a few relations.

Broadly speaking, the Borok families are of two types - Nuclear and Joint family. When their economic life centered round *huh* ("shifting cultivation) the Borok family was nuclear family. A Borok nuclear family consists of a married man and woman with their offspring, although in particular cases one or more additional persons may reside with them. Writing in 1869, T.H. Lewin, the then Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, had shown that a *Jhumia* family in Tripura could comfortably meet their needs from its *Jhum* and have enough surplus left over for festival and puja expenses, sickness and ornaments and cloths.[15] The Borok family, being dependent on jhuming or slash and burn cultivation, was no exception.

Lewin has described the Tripuris as a 'restless tribe'[16] shifting their villages every now and then. But in due course of time, their tendency towards the landed property, instead of nomadic life, made them live in a particular place. Given the necessary incentives, facilities, cultivable and fertile lands, the Boroks had shown that they were as much able to settle down as any other plains community. With the changes of economic life, the forms and functions of family had undergone adaptive changes. The transition from 'shifting cultivation' to 'plough cultivation' also changes the composition of their families, and thus extended or joint type of families started with their burgeoning agrarian society. A crucial stage in the development of culture emerged when peoplecạnjṭoiẏe a sedentary social life, a life in which, having forsaken a nomadic life of wandering they engaged in cattle raising and agriculture. This does not mean that there had been no such thought until the agricultural stage was reached. The transition from nuclear family based society to joint or extended type family was, thus, in essence, a structural change because with the emergence of extended family among the Boroks, their social structure too started to be more composite. The constituents of the family and its relations with the descent group are based on the system of marriage alliances, involving both circulation of women and the exchange of wealth associated with it, residence patterns, and rights relating to the wealth produced by the family as an independent unit as well as in its relationship with all other indigenous people.

The Borok family, prior to 1931 though of nuclear based, had many characteristics of traditional joint families such as excessive dependence on kinsmen and elders, child marriages, dependent position of women and authoritarian inter-personal relationship in the family. In other words, the idea of nuclear family, though in vogue, was not institutionalized nor was its sociological significance fully manifested in the absence of requisite structural changes in economic base of their society. A symbiotic relationship seemed to have started between agrarian - peasant societies and the extended family type.

A joint family is always an exciting group to live in. All the time something of interest is happening there. Now it is the marriage of a girl or of a boy, an initiation ceremony, the birth of a new born baby, the puberty rites of a new bride, some particular family rituals, a fast, a fest, sometimes a death. The great extent of the family always ensures the coming and going of guests. The brothers of the brides come to invite them to their mothers' houses, the daughters of the house are being brought for a family feast or wedding. There is always bustle and expectation, laughter, quarrels, discussions and plans. Traditional peasant societies everywhere in the world had a predominance of extended families. Usually such families were patrilocal and patriarchal, and in such families women had a relatively subordinate position; all members were guided in their activities by an elder family head and inter-personal relations of all members were authoritarian. Marriage in such families was governed by rules of kinship rather than courtship and was considered a matter of inter-familial and not inter-personal concern. Family in such society was also the unit of economic, cultural, religious and political activities. Since economic structure of such societies was closed, technological innovations were rare, the total volume of knowledge, which existed in the form of folklore, mythologies, riddles and folksongs, etc. could be handed down to the younger generation by the elders through the medium of oral tradition. For this reason, age was generally an important element governing society status and privilege in extended families.[17] To a child being brought up in such a family environment bonds of attachments are manifold and the emotional universe in which he can move is vast indeed.

The predominance of extended family or joint type of family among the Boroks was discernible upto the middle of the 1970s. Changes in the structure and functions of joint families among the Boroks were following a reconciliatory pattern - 'a pattern common in the structural changes in the Indian Society'.[18] With the burgeoning awareness of individual interest, the vested interest in the coparcenary property has sharpened the conflicts between the elders and the juniors of the family. Mutual recrimination over sharing the family burden, emphatic assertion of equal share in the family property became manifest. In extended Borok family, the eldest male member was always revered. To talk back was more or less sacrilegious. As a result, the nuclear family again came to be established. As the extended family changes into nuclear family, the socialization of the children in the family takes on a new direction; the children now have to grow in a comparatively smaller universe, there are not too many kinsmen to always fondle him and look after him.[19] In a nuclear family, emotional space is more constricted than alienation. The emotional universe of a child oscillates between degree of attachment and alienation, and the resultant tension breeds a type of personality that has greater emphatic capacity. Nuclear families are existentially situated in the milieu of an 'adaptive society' and not that of an 'established society' which is the overwhelming mode of a peasant society. In mate selection, the principle of personal choice is increasingly reconciled with parent's approval. Such reconciliation is, however, not without tension, which is an inalienable aspect of social change. There are, particularly after 1980s, coparcenary conflict, lack of reverence, economic and ideological disputes, change of religion (i.e. conversion), increase of family size, dispersal of familial kin due to non-availability of cultivable land etc. Despite these, the traditional world-view of the joint family of the Borok society stilly prevails.

**(2) Lineage:** In between family and clan there is another division that is lineage which is an extension of the family unit. The Boroks call it *sandai.* The concept of *sandai* which was the very basis of Borok kinship structure envisaged the formation of lineage group. The *sandai* bond was a great force in upholding the family solidarity. *Sandai* is homogeneous in its basic structure. With the increase in number of members within the *sandai* and their dispersion, intensity of the *sandai* bond has been lessened.

**(3) Kinship:** The Borok kinship refers wholly to the relationships based on descent and marriage. Kin or relatives, in Borok Society, are of two types - (i) Consanguineous kins - where individuals who are thought to be biologically related by 'blood', and (ii) Affinal kins - where individuals who are related through 'marriage'. These two types of kinship in the Borok society from an indispensable part of their social life. The Boroks classify their relatives through some kinship terminologies. Historically the kin terms are seen as a set of clues to relationships that have existed in the past, and then compare cultures in a given region in terms of the linguistic similarities in their terms. Language is more resistant to change than are social institutions. The words used to define kinship, therefore, would be older than the customs of the period in which the terms are collected, and can thus tell something of the past cultures.[20]

The kinship terms of the Boroks may be categorized into two systems: viz. Classificatory system, and Descriptive system. In a descriptive terminology system, the Boroks primarily refer to only direct biological relationships, such as, *chu* (grand father), *chwi* (grand mother), *pha* (father), *ma* (mother), *sajla* (son), *sajwk* (daughter), *bi* (elder sister), *hanwjwk* (younger sister), *ta* (elder brother), *phayung* (younger brother) etc. In a classificatory terminology system, they refer to a class of relatives, lineal as well as collateral, such as *kaka* (father's younger brother), *kaki* (uncle's wife or father's younger brother's wife), *yong* (elder brother of father and mother), *yongbwrwi* (wife of elder brother of father and mother), *totoi* (mother's elder and younger sister), *kumui* (sister's husband), *bachwi* (brother's wife), *prangsa* (wife's and husband's younger brother), *prangjwk* (wife's and husband's younger sister), *wai* (wife's elder brother and husband's elder brother for wife's and husband's lineal relation only), and *waijwk* (wife's elder sister and husband's elder sister for wife's and husband's lineal relation only).

Artificial relations such as *dormo pha* (father in collateral relation), *dormo ma* (mother in collateral relation), *dormo sajla* (son in collateral relation), *dormo sajwk* (daughter in collateral relation), *dormo bai* (elder sister in collateral relation), *dormo hanwjwk* (younger sister in collateral relation), *dormo phayung* (younger brother in collateral relation), *dormo dada* (elder brother in collateral relation), etc. are also found in the Borok society. The relation *of kicking oxyar* (friendship) between one man and another and *mare* between two women of the same level of relation or between husband and wife's female friend. The husband addresses his wife's female friend as *mare*, whereas the wife addresses her husband's male friend as *kicking* or *yar*. If the two male friends belong to two different levels of relations (one lower and the other higher), then they will address each other as *babjan* and if the two female friends are of two different levels of relations, then they will address each other as *maijan*. Their traditional socio-cultural life is based on all these kinships and other relations.

Within kin groups there are certain types of co-active behaviour pattern which exhibit regularity, more or less permanent and definite structure. Such types of behaviour, verbal and non-verbal, constitute kinship usage. In the Borok society, a Borok's centres around certain sets of relatives. In socio-economic, political and religious spheres he/she moves through these sets of relatives. He/she is essentially guided by a set of pattern of etiquette of institutionalized mechanism of social control which manifests itself in a structure from which he/she cannot deviate.

**(4) Position of the Elders:** Like in many tribal societies elders are placed at the topmost position in Borok Society. They are given a place of honour there. In a family, village and in the whole society the old people are honoured. This unlimited honour makes others feel jealous. From this angle, we can say that the eldei; men or women in Borok society arc fortunate enough. In any family of Borok society, the grandfather or father is the ultimate and sole authority of that family. The family is controlled and managed by him. His voice is final. He takes decision in every respect and his decision is counted as final. In case of necessity, he may consult with his wife or the eldest son to analyze the pros and cons of the matter. Generally no one disobeys the words of the elders. They respect their parents as if they are demi-gods. The parents can give necessary instructions, advices and in case of necessity do not hesitate even to chastise their sons or daughters, son-in-laws, unmarried brothers and sisters and the grand children. Among all the members of the family, the juniors always respect the elders. Younger brothers and sisters along with other younger members of the family always show sufficient honour to their elders. They always see them with the eyes of respect and veneration. They obey their orders and instructions. They never disobey their elders. They never dare to reply to elders face. They listen to the elder's instruction with downcast looks and attention. They also offer similar respect to their aunties, uncles and other elders. Thus, the maternal uncles and aunties, younger and elder brothers of their father are always placed on the seat of honour on equal level of their parents. Similarly the elders also love their younger. They never show lack of love and affection to them. Their eyes are always smeared with affection. Nevertheless, this moral value now seems to be on the degradation process.

**(5) Avoidance, Joking Relationship and Teknonymy:** Those patterned norms and usages, which are still prevailing in the Borok society, are avoidance, joking relationship and teknonymy. The rules of avoidance with regard to relatives termed '*buwairok*' and '*waijwkrok*' are strictly observed. Younger sister's husband of a woman, wife's elder brother and husband's elder brother are the men classified as '*buwairok*' and they are strictly avoided. Wife's elder sister, husband's elder sister and younger brother's wife are the women classified as '*waijwkrok*' and they are also strictly avoided. Wife's elder brother and wife's elder sister are respected by a man and he must avoid younger brother's wife scrupulously.

In addition to this, like in all societies, avoidance of one kind or another is observed in the Borok society in the relations between a '*hamjwksa*' (daughter-in-law) and '*krajwk*' and '*kra*' (parents-in-law). Similarly, a '*chamari's* (son-in-law) relations with his '*bwkrajwk*' (mother-in-law) and '*bwkra*' (father-in-law) are found to be cramped by certain restrictions, though less rigorously. Such kinship usage of avoidance is also manifested in a relation between wife's elder sister (*buwaijwk*) and husband *(bwsai)*. It is a tradition that they are not supposed to touch each other because they believe that whenever people come in contact with each other, the possibilities of co-operation as well as conflict are always equally present. But there are certain kinds of kinship where hostility is regarded as against social norms. To prevent such hostility from becoming manifest is to put restrictions on the growth ot intimacy; and hence such kinship usage of avoidance[21] seemed to have become into a socio-cultural tradition among the Boroks.

It is the socio-cultural practice of the Borok society that a man cannot marry his wife's elder sister and the widow of the younger brother. Further, if a man touches the younger brother's wife, he will be fined by the village council. This taboo is, however, lifted only during emergency time and some ritual called '*Sangmaimi*' (mostly prevalent among the Brus of the Borok society). During this ritual everybody is free to drink and dance. On this occasion a man can touch or hold his younger brother's wife's hand after blackening his palms by '*tisumu*' or '*tusmi*' (charcoal dust). On the other hand, a woman can drink and dance before her husband's elder brother but she has to respect him. A woman cannot be too familiar with younger sister's husband as the latter has to respect the former. Similarly a woman cannot be familiar with her husband's elder sister who has to be respected.

The reverse of the avoidance relationship is an extreme degree of familiarity expressed through joking relationship. Such joking in the Borok society may amount to exchange of abuse and banter, obscene and vulgar references to sex, damage of each other's property, ridicule and so on. Much familiarity and joking are permitted with persons who are classified as '*prangsa*' (wife's and husband's younger brother) and '*prangjwk*' (wife's and husband's younger sister). Such type of joking relationship is mostly found between a *chit* (grand-father) or *chwi* (grand-mother) and their affinal *suk* (grand-sons and grand-daughters), between wife and her husband's affinal *buprangrok* and *buprangjwk* (young brothers and sisters of husband), between a *kumui* (sister's husband) and *buprangrok* and *buprangjwk* (brothers and sisters-in-law). Like other tribal and non-tribal families, wife's younger brother and sister and husband's younger brother's wife stand in a joking relationship of general kind.

In the Borok society, the wife of a man is called '*hik*', whereas the husband of a woman is called '*sai*'. Traditionally, both husband and wife don't address each other by their name, rather by the word '*nwng*' (you) or sometimes by the word '*angsai*' (my husband) and '*ahik*' (my wife) or the wife is addressed by the husband as a mother of so and so, e.g. '*Chulungma*' or '*Gulungma*' (mother of *Chulung* or *Gulung*) and the husband is addressed by the wife as a father of so and so, e.g. *Chulungpha* or *Gulungpha* (father of *Chulung* or *Gulung*). Besides, the husband calls his wife '*Dongoi*' and the wife calls her husband '*Dida*'. The parents-in-law also hardly call their '*bahamjwk*' (daughter-in-law) and '*chamari*' (son-in-law) by name, rather they are addressed as '*hamjwksa*' (daughter-in- law) and '*chamarisa*' (son-in-law). Besides, traditionally addressing between the husband and wife's elder sister and also between the wife and husband's elder brother is not allowed by name, nor by '*nwng*' (a singular form of you) but always by '*norok*' (a plural form of you). A kind of restricted and respected relation seems to exist between them. But. such teknonymy or relations between one person and another, of late, however, due to impact of sanskritisation, westernization, modernization and globalisation are not strictly followed by themselves in their society. What is now observed and practiced in terms of relation is that many of the educated Borok people now address their life partners by names.

(6) **Rites and Customs of Passage:** Birth rites, puberty rites, marriage rites and death rites are the four major rites of passage in the Borok community, **(i) Birth Rites and Customs:** When the child is conceived in mother's womb the mother has to be very careful. The mother is afraid of the curse of the evil spirits. She is very cautious in terms of diet, drinking, wearing, speech, behaviour and other activities. She takes care of herself. Her mother-in-law and relatives especially the womenfolk advise her to be safe in this regard all the times medically. The woman does not go out of the house to worship gods and goddesses. However, she and her family members pray, worship and make some faith promises before gods and goddesses for safe delivery of the child.

*Mailuma*, a paddy goddess and *Khuluma*, a cotton goddess are benevolent goddesses which Boroks worship for the mother. Two women play a very important role at the time of child birth. They are called *Kumajwk* and *Lobmajwk*. *Kumajwk* is the person who helps the mother in her labour and delivery of the child at birth whereas *Lobmajwk* is the person who receives the new born baby in her hand. As soon as the child is born the *Lombajwk* blesses the baby for its long life by saying 'let the baby's life be like a stone and cotton'. Stone and cotton here signify the long life and purity of the child. Naming child at the time of birth is a rite of passage in one's journey of life. As part of tradition *Kumajwk* gives name to the new baby. It is the traditional practice for the Borok people to give name to the new born baby as soon as the baby is born and seen. *Kumajwk* is still busy with the mother of the child for the post-deliver activities. Inspite of the business of the *Kumajwk Lobmajwk* calls *Kumajwk* for naming the baby saying that *Kaithosa* (the Creator) has come to write and register the new born child's name in the book of life. So a Kokborok name is given to the child. In this way, life of a person starts. Priest is in-charge of the child's birth ceremony, family is the organizer and funding source, and priest presides over the ceremony. There is no difference in the rites and rituals according to the sex of the infant in Borok community.

After seven days of the birth, naming the child is another rite of passage. It is a ritual called *Amingsa ha kanvo* or *chwrai ha karwma*. The child is given another name after seven days of the birth i.e on the 8th day after the umbilical cord of a child gets dried and is fallen, the child is given another name (for example, Bkhakwthar, Hamrwnai, Bartikha, Sanmari, Simarwng, Mamita, etc.) by Priest (*Ochai*), but this name is not the original one, the earlier name given to the child by the *Kumajwk* at the time birth is the original name which the Creator has recorded and taken for the book of life. On this ritual day the priest performs *wathop* (a puja) for the welfare and protection of the mother and the child from attack by evil spirits (for example, *Swkal, Burasa* or *Haichukma*). There is no discrimination between male and female child in Borok community. Both male and female child are welcomed by the society.

**(ii) Puberty Rites:** At the time of reaching puberty level (12-14 years of age) Borok people perform rites and rituals relating to puberty of a child particularly of the girl child in Borok community. '*Risa Sormani*' (covering the breast of the girl child with traditional cloth '*Risa*') is a puberty rite for girl child. Generally, out of shyness the girl child does not want to cover her breast with '*Risa*' by herself. Because, one who covers the breast with a '*Risa*' is considered as '*sikla*' (youth). Her parents tell her sister-in-law or her elderly friends to cover their girl child with '*Risa*'. This rite is performed at night time on the special occasions of the community say, '*Goriya*' festival, '*Hojagri*' festival etc. No male-folk is present at the time of this rite. Sister-in-law, elderly friends and elder sisters of the girl child suddenly catch the girl child and cover her breast with 'Risa'.

**(iii) Marriage Rites and Customs:** Marriage is called *Kailaibari/ Kailaimung /Kailaipanda* in Kokborok. To hold any social, cultural and religious responsibilities in the Borok community, normally, any person, male or female must be a married person. In the Borok community, any young boy and girl can come together and live together only through marriage ceremony. If they are found living together without marriage ceremony they become socially illegal and they are declared outlawed and expelled by social council from the society. In this regard, disciplinary action is taken by the social council headed by village head called *Chokdri. Ochai* (Priest) is the in-charge of marriage ceremony, and he presides over this ceremony, both the families of the boy and the girl organize marriage ceremony and fund for this ceremony. In the past, Borok people traditionally practiced endogamy predominantly at the communal level.[22] It is mainly because of the reason that intermarriage between different classes of Tipperahs, though, permitted, are not of frequent occurrence before 1960s.[23]

Traditionally the months of *Chaitra* (April-May) and *Pons* (December-January) are avoided for marriage in Borok society. But now these months are not strictly avoided for marriage in Borok modern society particularly among the Borok Christians. However, some Borok Christians also avoid these months for marriage ceremony. There are various rites, rituals and customs associated with marriage among the Boroks. There are different types of marriage among the Boroks and a number of rites are performed for a wedding ceremony. Also there are local variations in each system. There are generally four types of marriages found among the tribal communities which are socially approved.[24] They are: (i) '*Nailai swnglai kaijakmani*' (Marriage by negotiation), (ii) '*chamari kamani*' (marriage by service) (iii) '*rang-ri rwi kaijakmani*' (marriage by purchase) and (iv) '*kharlai kaijakmani*' (secret marriage by elopement). Apart from these types of marriage, there are two more types of marriage found in the Borok community. They are: '*hamjagwi kaijakmani*' (love marriage), and '*khogwi talangwi kaijakmani*' (marriage by abduction).

Out of all these forms of marriage, the most prevalent form of marriage is negotiated or **mutual consent marriage.** It is an arranged marriage. Formal negotiation is initiated by the guardian i.e. parents of the bridegroom through the negotiator. In finalizing or setting up a marriage the guardian of the either side plays the sole role. The bride or the groom has no choice. This type of marriage always takes place in the house of the bridegroom.[25] **Marriage by service** is called '*Chamari Kamani*' in Kokborok. The bridegroom has to work in the household of the prospective bride's house. The bridegroom has to work there for a period ranging from one year to three years or even more as desired by the bride's side. Later the period of service was sought to be curtailed to a great extent. If the youngman was found suitable, the girl was given to him. But if he was found unsuitable, he was paid some compensation and was allowed to go back to his own house. But because of the influence of modernity this system of marriage has now become obsolete altogether. The reason is that such a system of marriage is not found in any other societies anywhere. This was the most popular marriage practiced among the Brus (Reangs) of the Borok community. In marriage ceremony two bamboo pentiles are made - one for marriage and the other for worshipping *Chibrwimwtai* (the fourteen deities). This is a new custom among them. **Marriage by purchase** means marrying a girl by offering a big amount of money and other valuable things to her parents. In this marriage by payment instead of rendering physical service the groom is more inclined to pay a certain amount of money to the bride's father for acquiring the mate. Such amount of money is known as bride-price. The bride side fixes this bride-price. At present, with the inclusion of education and influence of modernity in lieu of service a boy prefers to pay a certain amount of money as bride-price for attaining the matrimonial alliance where there is such system of marriage is in vogue. Nowadays, due to the impact of modernization the girl's side has to pay the groom-price or a kind of dowry which is not practiced traditionally among the Boroks. The **marriage by mutual consent and elopement** has been transformed into socially sanctioned love marriage with some formal proceedings as seen in formal marriages in the tribal society of Tripura. If a boy falls in love with a girl, the proposal is sent to the guardians of such boy and girl through a suitable medium and the guardians accept such proposal, then the marriage takes place with the formal ceremonies. Otherwise, the boy elopes with the girl and they reside in remote places from their village. Like in many other societies, **love marriage** is widely accepted now-a-days among the Boroks. The customs of this marriage is just like the normal social marriages. **Marriage by abduction** is a type of marriage where the girl is abducted by the boy and his group. The girl may or may not agree with the marriage proposal made by the boy. But marriage takes place between them under duress. This type of marriage being not socially sanctioned is not common in the modern Borok society.

Child marriage was/is not practised in Borok society. Though child marriage was not practised, early marriage was practised in the past. But now, it is not socially permitted in the Borok society. Of the different types of marriage, the marriage by negotiation between the two families is the normal system in the Borok society. In the traditional marriage system of the Jamatias of the Borok community, the bride is to be older than the bridegroom. But among the educated Jamatias, the seniority of the bridegroom is not the custom as in other communities of the Tripura.

Remarriage is permissible among the tribal society of Tripura. A man or woman remarries after the legal dissolution of marriage or after the death of his/her previous wife/husband. A man or woman cannot remarry during the lifetime of his/her husband/wife without divorce. However, for the widow, remarriage is allowed in tribal society but is not performed with much pomp, and festivity. Nevertheless, certain rites and rituals must be performed in such cases. For instance, among the Boroks, on the day of marriage the "*Lampra Wat hop*" and "*Tuisangrama*" worship are performed by *Ochai* (priest), and among the Jamatias of the Borok society at the time of marriage the worship of "chibwrwi inwtai'" (fourteen gods) is a must. A Borok widow may remarry if it so seems good to her. But a widow has to re-marry a widower and vice-versa. A widower cannot marry an unmarried girl.[26] So, marriage of a widower and widow is allowed, but with restricted rituals. Further a widow is not allowed to marry a bachelor. She has to choose a widower only. There is no such restriction in the case of a widower. The widow marriage is called '*Nokphirogo*' or '*Sindur Phulo*'. There is no such restriction in the case of a widower. W.W. Hunter observed that "A Tipperah widow may re-marry, if it so seems good to her. Every lad before marriage has his sweetheart and he cohabits with her whenever opportunity serves, this however, is without knowledge of the elders...." [27] It is to be noted that among the Borok people monogamy type of marriage is socially approved whereas polygamy is socially prohibited. Polygamy was practiced but not polyandry. Polygamy, though not objected, is very rare in the Borok society. It is seen as a sign of moral degradation when the wife is alive but seen as a moral obligation to the parents when the wife is no more.

The Boroks traditionally avoid marriage with any *jaiti* (persons closely related to either the paternal or maternal side). Marriage within four generations is socially avoided. *Buyai hai kaijakmung* (levirate) and *Buyaijwk bai kaijakmung* (sororate) are socially not permitted. Monogamy is the general rule of the Borok marriage form.[28] Polygamy though not completely conspicuous by its absence, polyandry is absolutely prohibited in the Borok society.

Traditionally, the general dowry system was not known to the Borok people. But. due to the influence of the non-tribal people, it is now quite common among them. In fact, in the past, in order to marry a girl the boy had to serve girl's parents at girl's house for one to three years and also had to pay a certain amount of money. But today, the girl's parents have to pay a certain amount of cash money and modern electronic gadgets such as television, computer, motor bike, motor vehicle, washing machines, etc. The dowry system was socially interdicted by the Boroks, but is seen nowadays due to the prevalence of exogamy and partly due to the influence of Hinduism.

Marriage broker or marriage mediator who negotiates with both the families of the bride and the bridegroom is called '*Raiba*' in Kokborok. The marriage is held at the house of the bridegroom. On the opening of the day of '*Kokswngma*' (Marriage Engagement) the bridegroom's party goes to the bride's house and the party is entertained with home made rice-beer. The bride comes and is presented with money by the persons present. A feast is held. After the feast, the bride has to wash the hands of all elderly persons.

On the previous day of the marriage, several rites and rituals are performed by both the families of the bride and bridegroom. This ceremony is called *'Kuwaitano'*. Ceremonial water is fetched; betel-nut and betel-leaf are cut by women. These women also make some auspicious sound by moving their tongues within their mouths twice in the name of the bride and seven times in the name of the bridegroom at the residence of the bride. This sound made by the woman-folk is called '*Jogluo*' in Kokborok.

Divorce is the formal dissolution of marriage. Divorce prevails among the Boroks. It is called '*Kaklaimani*'. The system of divorce varies from sub-tribe to sub-tribe. But there is a fine for the party seeking divorce. In case the wife seeks divorce she has to pay the cost of the marriage feast and the wages of the bridegroom for the entire period of service at the bride's house. The village council sanctions the divorce, and the council as fee takes a portion of the money, realized from the party seeking divorce. For a divorce, a meeting of the village leaders is held at the house of the husband or the wife's father. There the husband or the wife seeking divorce makes a statement about his or her grievance. The assembly also hears the answer of the other party. Then the village council passes its 'judgement'. If divorce is the decision, the husband now-a-days has to sign a paper to this effect. Even after divorce the husband and the wife may resume their conjugal life, if they like. In that case, they have to perform a puja with the help of the village priest and destroy the document of divorce, if any. Divorce can be obtained among the Boroks, on the consultation and adjudication by the *Kami Chokdri* and *Hoda Okra.* Insanity, cruelty, infidelity, barrenness, adultery, etc. are the grounds on which divorce can be sought in the society. Of course, nowadays, several changes have, however, been observed in the marriage norms of the Borok society. Exogamy is no longer unheard of Junior sororate is seen nowadays, not the senior sororate. Dowry, which was in the olden days considered as a social affront and interdiction, is nowadays becoming a convention.[29] The contemporary practice of exogamy, junior sororate and dowry system clearly shows deviation from the traditional social and cultural system of the Borok community, though not without a conflict between modernism and traditionalism. Increasing social and cultural heterogeneity tends to social stratification and a tendency towards centralised political control. In the process of stratification and the building up of a hierarchy, marriage alliances are of importance. Endogamous alliances strengthened a small group with potential and actual power. Exogamous marriages were more suitable for the assimilation of new groups.[30]

(v) **Death Rites and Customs:** Thexremation site is normally near the bank of a stream or river, but this place should be a little far away from the domestic area or village area. If a person dies, a priest is called and brought to the family and a *lampra wathop* is performed by the priest where a chicken is sacrificed to pay respect to the soul of the deceased. Various types of food such as rice, liquor drinks, cakes, eggs, chicken etc. placed on a sieve are offered to the deceased for the last food at the worship altar *wathop),* then the priest declares that the dead bodycan now be taken away. An advance party is sent to the cremation place for preparation. The children of the deceased and other family members and relatives carry the dead body on their shoulders to the cremation site.

Borok people believe that after death a person becomes a god or goddess, or the deceased person may be born again as human in other family, then the person becomes a spirit. They believe that god is spirit and spirit is god. But the deceased is now without any physical existence, now he/she can attain a physical existence or body by taking another human birth again in other human womb only. They believe and say that some people look like some deceased. It is not clear that whether the dead goes to the hell or heaven. Sometimes, hell is compared with filthy places or latrine site, but the concept of heaven is not very clear.

Death ceremony is given importance in Borok society. Similar to giving importance to marriage, they give importance also to the death of a person. Both man and woman of Borok community use to preserve the clothes of marriage for wearing those dresses on the day of his or her death. Before their death i.e., during life time they tell their children, daughter-in-law and grand-children in advance to bathe their dead body with water and put them on the traditional dresses/clothes during the death ceremony. Thus, death ceremony becomes an enjoyable one.[31]

It is said in the folksong of Borok people that after death the soul of the deceased goes to 'Lali' the owner of the human souls. Borok people traditionally believe that if the deceased takes food prepared by 'Lali' the deceased forgets her children and grandchildren. So the daughters and daughter-in-laws weep "O mother don't eat the rice and water prepared by 'Lali', because you may forget us in future when we will be meeting you again after our death". 'Lali' is not a human being, but is the spirit to whom the soul of the deceased goes after death.[32]

Nowadays Borok people practise *terodin* and *sraddha* ceremony. But originally there is no such ceremony in the Borok community. Traditionally, dead body of a person is taken to a cremation site and burnt there. After the funeral service is over before returning home, men and women tie grasses there on the ground at the cremation site, menfolk bite lire wood coal and *dan* (knife) after reaching at home, so that the deceased may not be attacked by the evil spirits. They simply believe that the deceased becomes god or goddess and after becoming god or goddess the person cannot be seen any more by the people on this earth. Since the deceased has already become god or goddess he or she still eats and drinks, so the deceased needs foods, drinks, house, shelter etc. Therefore, foods, drinks, etc. are offered to the deceased at the time of food offering ritual called *maikhlai rwmani*. Birth cycle concept is there in Borok community but not the concept of law of karma. They also believe that the deceased person becomes human or the same person again.

Both cremation and burial of the dead body is in vogue among the Boroks. But cremation is now the predominant custom, obviously due to non-tribal Hindu influence.[33] However, the dead body of a baby below 18 months is buried. If a pregnant woman dies, she is to be cremated, but her child or fetus should be taken out and buried. Formerly burial was practiced as an alternative method. Now the Borok Christian practicebyrial like other Christians. Some Borok non-Christians also practice the same in the past Vegetarian diet is used for three to five days by the Borok traditional family and relatives of the dead.

The dead body is first washed with warm water and dressed. Then it is placed on a pyre with the head of the dead towards the north. *Tulsi* leaves and mustard oil are put on the eyes. The relatives put paddy, sesame, cotton etc. at the feet of the body. Money is placed on the chest with the left hand. Honey is put in the mouth. A cock is sacrificed at the feet of the dead by striking it against the ground with the left hand. The rice is cooked in a bamboo-pipe or an earthen utensil. This rice and the sacrificed cock are offered to the dead putting them in a bamboo basket. In another basket some other things are kept. Then the body is tied with a thread in seven coils at the leg side. The brier is put down at the cremation ground with the head of the dead towards the north. The family of the dead should own the burning ground. If the burning ground is a common cremation ground, a mock purchase of the ground is to be made by throwing away four copper coins there in four directions.[34]

Then the dead body is placed on the funeral pyre and some more firewood is put on the body. A ball of kneaded rice, banana, sesame, ghee, honey etc. is made and put into the mouth of the dead as his/her last meal. The funeral rites are performed under the guidance of a priest. Then the *mukhagni* or *mwkhangni* rite is held by the eldest son of the dead (in case of a married man and woman). In the case of an unmarried man or woman, any brother of the deceased does the same rite. This is called '*Hortanlaio*'. This is like the same rite of the general Hindus. The son makes three to seven rounds of the body with the lire in a bamboo stick held in his left hand. A new earthen pitcher full of water is then broken near the feet of the dead. Then the relatives present set fire to the pyre one after another.

The fire burns and body is reduced to ashes. Then water is poured on the pyre seven times with a gourd shell of the *Jhum* obviously to put out the dying fire. Then the funeral party leaves for the house of the deceased family. They never look back. After returning they take bath, touch, touch fire, and sprinkle their head and body with water sprayed with a *Tulsi* leaf. On the fourth day i.e. on the day of *Terotri,* the son who performed *Mukhagni* goes to the cremation ground together with some others. He collects one small piece of skull of the dead, puts it in a bamboo container, and later on buries it in some pond near his house or it is thrown in Gumoti river, Tirtha Mukh, Dumbur, or any river during *Hangrai.* The period of mourning lasts twelve .days and the Sraddha ceremony is held on the thirteenth day. A Brahmin Priest is engaged to officiate and everything is performed according to his direction and in accordance with the Hindu Sraddha rules. So it may be said that this is practically adopted from the Bengalee society.[35] At the last stage of Sraddha offering of food and drink are made to the departed soul. This death rite is called 'Maikhlai' ritual. The person who makes the offering to the departed soul, on return, bathes and makes obeisance to the Sungod.[36]

**(7) Satee Custom:** It was the most inhuman system that on the death of a husband his widow had to bum herself in the funeral pyre of her husband. Here, it may be mentioned that after having interviewd with some Borok community experts it has been learned that *Satee* system was not prevent originally in the Borok community. However, there is no denying the historical fact that *Satee* system had been prevalent among the Brus and the Jamatias of the Borok community of Tripura particularly in the hill Tripura from ancient time. *Satee,* a ghastly system, which had been prevalent in British India till the first quarter of the nineteenth century, was in vogue in hill Tripura from ancient time. In hill Tripura, as we find, the cruel system of Satee continued to be practiced for a long period of time even after its abolition in British India in 1829.[37] During the reign of Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya Bahadur of Tripura, a letter from the British India

Government through the Assistant Political Agent Umakanta Das of Hill Tipperah Kingdom was received by the Maharaj's Durbar to send the opinion of the Royal Government regarding the abolition of the *Satee* system in hill Tripura.[38] The Maharaja was prompt enough to make it public that the government had no inclination to go against suppressing the custom of Satee which at that time existed only among the hill people in the interior of the state.[39]

**(8) Customs of Inheritance:** Boroks were basically *Jhum* cultivators who entered into regular farming at a much later time. Gradually, they started possessing personal properties. The ownership would continue until the land was sold or distributed. So. in those days, their properties were a few things only such as a plot of small land, a few domestic animals and some ornaments used by the women and so on. Transition from the age-old practice *of Jhum* cultivation to that of settled cultivation has brought out certain changes in the right of inheritance and other customary norms.[40]

The properties of the Boroks can be divided into two categories – achieved through inheritance and personal properties earned with hard labour. The sons and daughters inherit their father's property. Generally, the youngest son inherits the lion share. The balance is equally distributed among other sons and daughters. In Borok society even the girl shares her father's property. But that is not compulsory. Sometimes the married or unmarried girls share their father's property depending on the sweet desire of her father or brother. There is no room for force or compulsion there. Sometimes the head of a family also can offer some share in the name of his wife. If the wife passes, her last portion of life with her son or daughter, then they possess that property. No one else can demand ownership of that land. But if the relation among other brothers and sisters is good and sweet, sometimes they also can share their mother's property. Or if the amount of that property is big enough, then other brothers or sisters also can achieve a little part of it as inheritance. If a widow mother gets married for the second time, the second husband can't claim the ownership of that property.[41]

Nowadays, if the head of family expires, only his sons occupy the lion's share of his property. The daughters can get a minimum portion of it. After the expiry of husband, the wife's whole property is generally enjoyed either by a son or a daughter or that widow where she takes shelter. If the mother desires, she can also distribute some portion of that land to some of her other sons or daughters before her death. Of course, her daughters generally occupy the registered land in the name of mother. If the husband of her daughter lives with her (known as *nokni chamari*), then a lion share of that immovable property should be given to that daughter. Besides, there are also properties like domestic animals and other goods of daily use. Many people also have not only the land properties, but also a pair of oxen, a milk giving cow or goat, cock and other necessary paraphernalia needed for family life, especially when the married couple arrange for separate living.

In Borok society, generally the father distributes his land among his sons or daughters during his lifetime. In some other cases, the property is distributed after his death. Of course, sometimes, this is also found that they have more or less a fight over the inheritance of land and properties even in the lifetime of their father. So, sometimes, being afraid of this possible tight after his death, the father feels compelled to distribute his land before his death. Sometimes, it is also found that the elders create a kind of pressure to do so. Due to invalid health, sometimes the father likes to get rid of family problems and social complexities, finally by distributing his property to the concerned people. The problem may get more complex when the father accepts more than one wife. In such a case, the sons or daughters of each wife may claim equal share over the properties and generally it so happens quite often. At the time of distribution of the property, the father keeps his own share and his wife's share only. He can also keep the share meant to be given to the unmarried daughter or immature children under his custody. If someone has got a second wife, then the descendants of the second wife also can have equal right over their father's property. But this facility is given only to the direct descendants of a father. In case of a lady who got married for the second time already having child or children from her first husband, this facility is denied, i.e. the children born from previous father cannot occupy the property of their step-father. This rule is being followed in Borok society for long period of time.

Besides that, there is also the tradition of accepting step-sons or daughters in Borok society. These step-sons or daughters are treated as good as their direct children. And the step-children also consider their step-father as good as direct father. If they think as different, it is considered as sins. So in many families where there are no issues, acceptance of step-children is found as a common affair. They also possess the whole property of their step-parents like their direct descendants. If there are no step-children or direct children, the property is possessed by the sons of his brothers. If the father has only a daughter and no son, then the daughter alone can occupy the whole property of her father. After the death of the father, their mother maintains the daughters. A widow can inherit the possession of all the properties of her dead husband who left no issues behind; but in case the widow gets remarried, then the dead man's brothers or sons of his brothers inherit the property. The same rule is applicable when the widow dies.

In some other cases, someone may form a separate and new family, being separated from father's family even in the lifetime of his father, and then father also immediately hands over his due share. Thus, receiving his due share the son also happily maintains his separate family along with his wife and children. In such case, he cannot demand more and extra share on his father's property after the death of his father. Sometimes someone may get separated from his father's family willingly and by force. Under the circumstance, the father may withdraw all support and temporarily may not give any property to him out of grievance. But again, when the grievance is pacified, the father gives his son his due share. Or he may not get any share as long as the father is alive but after the death of his father he achieves his due share. One can also earn some personal property even living together in a joint family. In such case, others cannot interfere on that property. Thus, the system of extra earning by personal labour is known as '*choroi rwmung*'.

**(9) Dress and Ornament:** Nature plays an important role in the development of art. Art. in turn, plays a vital role in man's life and society.[42] The natural abundance and infinitude of nature stimulates certain responses in the aesthetic sensibility of men. In primitive society, art is not highly developed nor is consciously cultivated but it encompasses everything from cradle to cremation. Their art is their life. The dress and ornaments of the society of the tribes are one of the mediums of art. The indigenous tribal people of Tripura who dwell in hilly, forested and scenic habitat of rivers and valleys also reflect high accomplishment in the fields of arts. The media of artistic expressions are varied and unique. In spite of primitive technology and poor economic conditions, the tribes of Tripura particularly the Boroks are rich in spinning, dying and weaving which are primarily controlled by the womenfolk. The varied dresses which are rich in design not only serving the bare necessities of life but also reflect the socio-political status and the ritual significance from the very design of the bearers.

Like all hill people of Tripura, traditionally, the Boroks too use clothes made by themselves at home. There is a loom almost in every man's house at which a woman is always engaged at leisure hours. 'Rignai' *(Pachhra)* a strong, thick and usually black piece, two cubits long and a cubit and a quarter broad, worn by women. A strong piece of different colours, two cubits long and half a cubit broad, used by the young hill women as breast-cloths was known as *Riya*. The 'Rignai' and "Risa", as they are commonly called, are used by all womenfolk of the Borok community, though the colour combination differs from sub-tribe to sub-tribe. These are woven in a traditional loin loom.

The Borok women are generally experts in weaving, and they weave for the entire family. In fact, a tradition has it that a young girl has to know weaving. If not, she faces problems in her father-in-law's house after marriage. The traditional dresses of the old women are comparatively of simple design than the young women. The origin of *Risa* - used for covering breast is shrouded with mystery. Its origin can be traced back to the mythological age. A belief still exists that the art of making *Risa* gained its technological perfection during the reign of Trilochan who was commonly known as 'Subrai Raja' among the Borok people. The design of *Risa,* from olden days, is being prevalent among the Boroks generation after generation. Till today, the mother-in-law gives it as a presentation to a new bride. On the demise of mother-in-law, the *Risa* is placed on her dead body at the time of funeral ceremony. All these are ritual significance of *Risa*. Weaving was so much a part of their lives that the young girls were brought up on stories built up around it. The Cinderella like story of how an orphan girl married a crown prince because of her innovative designs is often told along with the story of how a girl wove a snake to such perfection that it bit her on her breast.[43]

Borok traditional women have long hairs decorated with some flowers like *Khumpui* flower and other seasonal flowers and *Rang*

*Bwtang* (silver necklace) on their neck. Our queens like Queen Sudakshina used to put on *Risasorbangi* (a small piece of Borok dress for covering the chest of the women), *Rang Bwtang* on their neck, *Wakhum* and *Toya* (ear ring) on the ear, big size *Mathia* (bangle) on the hand, which make a Borok woman beautiful. Generally, colours of the Borok dresses are red, black, white and yellow only. Facial structure – sweet and semi-oval shape look *(mwkhang twilwlwk),* big and wide eyes, sharp nose, neck looking like pigeon's neck; therefore people wear on their neck *rang bwtang,* copying and looking like the pigeon's neck look. It is the beauty of the physique of women and men, men's arm/hand looking like *muikhum* shape (banana fruit budding flower), wide chest, slightly slim waist, leg with bamboo-shoot shape. Hair style – Borok people were not used to hair-cut, and women used to tie hair on the back of the head fixed with *surang* (a clip made of bamboo) and men used to tie hair on the surface top of head fixed with *surang.* Beautiful women with wide and high chest, slim waist, look like deer, buttocks with medium size, medium height, pigeon neck, medium size head, smooth body with smooth skin, active and knowing how to work, *risasorbangi* on chest, putting on *rignai chamathwi,* etc.

Women folk mostly use ornaments like *wakhum* on ear (made of bamboo cane), *toya* on ear (made of bamboo), *baili* (on nose), children wear *cheruwai* (ear ring), *loloki, rangbwtang* (silver necklace) *mathia* (bangle) on wrist, *mathia* on ankle. Till recently the Borok men had and some still have their own distinctive ways of clothing/dressing themselves and these are often artistic and well adapted to the conditions of their life. Among the men, a thick turban is worn, and a narrow piece of homespun cloth with a fringed end and handing down in front and rear, passes once round the waist and between the legs. In the cold season they wear a rudely sewn jacket.[44] The thick turban – a hard- woven thick cloth – is commonly known as 'khorok-risa' and the 'cloth with a fringed end' is nothing but dhuti-like clothes. This dress is intrinsically linked with their economic life, which centred *on jhum* cultivation. Like their womenfolk, the menfolk also use *ritrakborok* in cold season.[45] *Kamchwlwiborok* (jacket-like-shirt) made of coarse home-woven fabric was a distinct individuality of the traditional Borok dress of the men, though womenfolk also used it. The individuality of this dress finds explicit manifestation when a Borok man goes out for jhum-cultivation with a da-borok (a sickle with a wooden handle) in his hand.

Borok men hardly use ornaments. Flowers are used as embellishment/ornaments by men/women in Borok community. They like white colour flower most. There are beautiful flowers. *Khumpui* (hilly-lily (lower) a white colour flower is the Borok national flower. White colour flower is preferable and is highly regarded in the community. White colour stands for purity. Therefore, they love person with pure heart, say white flower, white clothes, white colour is preferable everywhere. For example, "Rignai Chamathwi, 'Ritrakborok' (Borok Shawl) and any Borok dress have 80% white colour and 20% other colours in almost all these Borok clothes.[46] Borok traditional ornaments are called *Kannvbai* in Kokborok.

**(10) Adoption** (*Bwsarinyi):* Adoption is a recognized institution among the Boroks although it is rarely found. In the past, adoption among the Boroks was limited to their own community. But now-a-days, Borok customary law permits inter-tribal adoption. Now, the Borok may even adopt a non-Borok child. According to the Borok customary law, adoption is permitted if there is no child in the family. If a Borok couple having no issue to look after them during their old days and to inherit their possessions and if they prefer to have an adopted child, they may do so. A child, adopted for the purpose of inheritance supports the adoptive parents during their old-age and performs the funeral rites after their death, if the adoptive parents have no male child. In the same manner, a girl may also be adopted for the purpose other than inheritance. A child, who loses his/her parents before reaching adulthood may be adopted by any of his/her agnates or anybody who ensures his/her safe upbringing. For adoption of a child express consent of both the parents is necessary. In case a child is desired to be adopted, consent of both the husband and wife is necessary. Moreover, prior consent to the parents of the child to be adopted must be obtained. In absence of the parents of the child to be adopted, the legal guardian of the child accords consent for adoption subject to the approval of the *Sandai* or the *hokchu* (particularly prevalent among the Brus). A guardian cannot allow adoption of a child without prior approval of the *Sandai*. Even the adopting parents, too have to wait for the approval of the *Sandai*. Both a window and widower can adopt either a boy or a girl. A deaf and dump person, can be adopted by a couple having no child or by a spouse having a child. An adopted child enjoys the same rights and privileges as a child born of lawful wedlock. The adopted son abides by all the rules and regulations of the adoptive family.[47]

Payment of money or any other property in consideration of adoption is not compulsory. The adopted child must live with the adoptive parents so long as the adoptive parents are alive and at the same time he must obey the parents. Adoption of any boy or a girl to any clan through the performance of *Panjihami* and worship of *Sangrongma,* shows the flexibility of family and kinship structure. However, all these customary laws, rituals related to adoption, have almost gone out of practice, possibly being influenced by the changing forces of the modern socio-economic culture of the Borok people.

**(11) Fostering** (*Bwsarima/Pa/aima*): Fostering is a recognized institution in the Borok society though it is very rare among them in modern times. Generally arrangements are made for suckling and upbringing of a child by another woman who is capable of doing so, if the mother of the child dies or unable to suckle her baby. Also in case of any infectious disease of the mother, the child is given over to a foster mother or wet-nurse. The parents of the foster child may give some articles such as paddy, pig etc. to the foster parents as a token of gratitude. If the parents of the foster child are not alive, in that case the foster parents can keep the foster child in their house as an adopted one. There is no fixed or hard and fast rule as to how long and to what extent the foster parents are to remain socially and economically responsible for the foster child. The child may in his discretion continue to remain with the foster parents or may return to his own parents after the period of fostering.[48] Conflict of superiority or inferiority among the foster parents and the parents of the foster child is normally not seen. The foster child cannot inherit or succeed to its foster parents in respect of properties, if he comes back to his parents' house. But, a foster child may, if recognized as an adopted son, enjoy all the rights and privileges as a child born of lawful wedlock. Customary practices in respect of fostering the child in the Borok society appears to be very flexible and also very liberal. Such an attitude towards this custom was held, perhaps because the protection of the life of the foster child is of first concern in the Borok society.

**(12) Traditional Dormitory** (***Jainok***): Traditional dormitory system was an outstanding trait of the socio-cultural life of most of the tribal people of North east region of India. In the traditional indigenous tribal societies of Tripura particularly among the Borok people, the bachelor's dormitory was known by the name *Jainok* in Kokborok. *Jainok*, a bachelor's dormitory once existed in a widespread manner was a non-formal education system for the Borok youths. In the past life of the Borok people it played a very important role in catering to the needs of the Borok traditional society. This non-formal educational institution created enthusiasm in the minds and heart of the youths and learning takes place in the desirable manner. It was expected that everybody contributes according to one's skill and capabilities and becomes a useful and good member of the society. This traditional non-formal institution had fulfilled the need and aspirations of the society at that time. But in due course of time with pace of modernisation and development taking place this useful institution of the Borok society had been replaced by formal educational institutions or schools in the modern society. The tremendous impact of modernisation on this traditional institution is that it is now no longer alive in the Borok society.

**(13) Community Store-House (*Dhormogula*):** *Dhormogula* was the Borok traditional village community store-house. This store-house was a Borok traditional store-house of rice stored and maintained in the house of the village head called *Chokdri*. With the permission of the village council headed by *Chokdri*, at the time of the urgent need of rice, any villager or family of the village could take loan of rice at a very low rate of interest or without any interest in some cases, from this traditional institution called *Dormogula*. Money was never deposited in the *Dormogula*, but only rice was stored in it. It was a kind of Borok traditional loaning / banking institution, which, in due course of time, has been substituted by modern banking system, insurance agencies and Self Help Groups (SHG). So, the Borok traditional *Dormogula* is currently no longer existent in the Borok society.

**(14) Rites of Construction and Inauguration of House:** Although the king of Tripura lived in a house built with bricksand some nobles lived in houses built with bricks and woods, most of the Tripura tribal people in the hills lived in bamboo huts known as 'Garing Nok' or 'Char Nok' *(Tong Ghar)*. These bamboo huts built on a raised platform five to six feet above the ground were supported by tree or bamboo poles. The houses seldom contained more than one room. But now most of the tribal people particularly the Boroks live in mud house, *half kacchctjhalf pakka* house and also in house built with bricks. Only very few of them in the hill areas now live in *Garing Nok*. This is due to the impact of modernization on the socio-cultural life of the Boroks.

House construction in Borok community is attended with some rites and customs and also superstitions. The first thing in this connection is the examination of the soil. It is not a scientific examination but by other curious and ludicrous means, which constitute superstition. Some soil is collected from the selected homestead. The soil is kept under the pillow of the house owner. It is believed that he will dream a peculiar dream that night regarding the site selection. The man will narrate his dream events to the village *Ochai* (priest) or some old person. The Priest or the old listener then gives his views about the site. Then, the *Ochai* is requested to perform some rites for the welfare of the family after construction of the house. A bamboo post, a bamboo cane, a banana leaf with some rice on and a chicken are all that is required. The chicken is sacrificed to the house deity, *Noksumwtai* by the *Ochai*. This deity is said to be the guardian deity of a house. He may be compared to the Vedic deity *Vastopati* (Lord of a residential house).

The *Ochai* then examines the entrails of the sacrificed chicken to ascertain the future of the proposed house. If the entrails are in a good condition, it means good for the house. If not, the indication is that the house will not do well to the family. This is obviously a superstitious belief. What is more obvious here is that chicken sacrifice is a must in every ritual of Boroks because of their love of meat. The *Ochai*, however, performs further rites for welfare in case the entrails show any evil omen. But, now-a-days, urban Borok people do not depend on entrails examination but on the soil examination of the relevant department of the government.

After this soil examination and rites for well-being, the construction work starts with erection of the first post in the north-east corner of the homestead. In the hole, mustard seed, rice turmeric, mango and *tulsi* leaves, a little gold etc. are placed before landing the post in the hole. The *Ochai* guides in this entire affair. The same things are also tied at the top of the post. Sometimes, a bow is also tied there. This probably shows the original hunting profession of the tribe. After all this, the house is constructed with the help of the carpenters.

As in the general Hindu Society, some rituals are performed by the Boroks before entering the newly built house. They have to worship the two deities called *Mailuma* and *Khuluma.* They are the female deities of paddy and cotton respectively. These worships indicate that the house owner expects prosperity in respect of a paddy and cotton or food and clothing by the favour of these deities in the new house.

The puja requires sacrifice of a big cock; the fowl sacrifice is a must in everything of the Boroks and other indigenous tribal people alike. After these pujas, *Lampra Wat hop* puja is also held. This puja is held on the day of entering the house, while the two other pujas are to be performed on the previous day. So the whole ceremony is a two-day affair. Alter *Lampra Wathop* puja some more pujas are also required - the worship of *Sangrongma* (Ganga), and two brother Gods *Akhata* and *Bikhata.* More cocks are sacrificed for these pujas. Not only sacrifice of cocks but also their entrails examination is held.

After all these rituals, the ceremonial entering of the house is done. The *Ochai* guides every rite. Last of all, a big feast is held in which the *Ochai* and all other invited people take part. All are fed with fowl curry and other articles of food arranged by the house owner according to his capacity. This is the traditional Borok way of entering into a newly built house. But things are fast changing. Some educated and urban Borok people are greatly influenced by the neighbouring non-Borok customs. Now, some Boroks employ Bengalee priests in their social functions including entry into a new house.

**(15) Socio-Cultural Festivals:** *Goriya, Buiso, Hangrai, Hojagiri, Mamita. Ker, Kharchi,* etc. are the major festivals which are gorgeously performed by the Boroks. On these days of festivities, younger members of the family lit incense and offer their obeisance at the feet of elders by offering flowers and pure water. On these days the parents and the grand parents take bath in warm water and put on new dresses. But nowadays, due to modernization this tradition is likely to die out.

In the past, the Borok village was a single unit for all socio-cultural, religious and agricultural festival purposes. With the advent of Christianity and other religions and acceptance of these religions by the Boroks (say Boroks beginning to accept Christianity in 1938), things have begun to change and are changing. Villages are now split into Christian and non-Christian cliques. It is not an exaggeration to say that Borok Christians are gradually giving up some of the traditional faiths and practices, festivals and drinking of home-made rice beer. Every Sunday has become a compulsory holiday for them. Thus, confrontation is developing between the old and the new. The age-old village unity which was nourished up with proper care by their forefathers and ancestors is gradually decaying. *Ker Puja* is a very important and popular Borok religious festival. This puja is held after 15 days of *Kharchi Puja.* This puja was given importance by the royal family of Tripura, because the Kings themselves in the Palace Compound held the puja for the general welfare and safety of the State and royal family. This puja is still performed in the Palace Compound every year by the royal family of Tripura.

The Borok people performed *Ker puja* in every village. This puja was performed for the welfare, safety, protection and prosperity of the entire village. But nowadays, due to the influence of modern development and other factors, this puja is not being held in every village. On the day *of Ker Puja* a bamboo pole as a signal called '*Khong*' (Bamboo Cane) is posted in the ground at the entry point of the village forbidding entry into the village. The village boundary becomes the *Ker Puja* area. During this puja nobody is allowed to enter the village and go out of the village. The sick people and pregnant women are taken out of the village before hand. If anybody happens to violate the rule of the *Ker Puja,* then he or she will be charged with a fine as penalty. This is a kind of passage rite of the Boroks. But gradually, this socio-cultural custom is now dying out. *Ker* puja was performed very strictly in every village by the village community headed by *Chokdri* or *Kami Kasko* (Village Head) where village planning was made for the entire year. But nowadays, *ker* is hardly performed in Borok villages. But in some villages this traditional *ker* has been replaced by the *Kalipuja, Lakshmipuja and Durgapuja* and animal sacrifice is being practised during *Kalipuja.*

**(16) Socio-Administrative Structure:** As a traditional administrative, social and cultural system, the individual tribe was the subject of the Maharaja and not of the *Sardar* or Chief of his tribe, but the tribe as a whole enjoyed much of freedom. This was so because the Maharaja treated the *Rai* or *Sardar* of a tribe as a subordinate king (*Samania Raja*). The position of the Maharaja of Tripura vis-a-vis the government of British India may be compared with the relation between him and his tribal chiefs.[49] During the year 1919-20, a *robokaree* (proclamation) was issued as guidelines of relationship between the chiefs and the *missips* or officials.[50] Gradually, the election of the *Sardars* in the tribal society was replaced by nomination. So there was every scope to be a *Sardar* through the exercise of influence. This trend of nomination instead of election is noticeable among the Brus (Reang) from 1940. Only among the Jamatias of the Borok community, the election process remained in existence.[51]

With the dawn of independence the introduction of Statutory Panchayati System throughout India, urbanisation and other arrangements of modern welfare state have adopted almost all the functions of the traditional tribal council and chieftainship. The traditional political organisation of the tribal community in Tripura, permitted to function during the Pre-British and even during the British times, is now, since independence, threatened by the increasing pressures of the administrative control of the modern government. Some recent studies on the tribal socio-political formations have objectively demonstrated the fact that tribal societies have not been static ones and having potential for change they have kept on changing due to forces working from within and without.[52]

Socially, culturally and politically all the members of a Borok village were under the direct control of Maharaja of Tripura; there was a single religion i.e. Borok traditional religion, a single administration system and single political system i.e. monarchy system, but now members of a single village belong to many political and social organizations being a byproduct of modern democratic system introduced among the Borok people back in 1949.

The Borok Hoda System which is still most prevalent among the Jamatias, has a three- tier system of social administration. At the highest of the echelon, there is a *Hoda Okra*. The *Hoda Okra* is not hereditary, but is chosen by election. Just below the *Hoda Okra*, there are some *'Mayal Panchays'*. At the lowest rung of the ladder, the Boroks have *'Chokdri'* in each village which they term as '*Luku*'. A *Luku* is an important socio- administrative unit among the Boroks at the village level. A village is the second form of association, generally more complex than the family, and aiming, as Aristotle says 'at something more than the supply of daily needs', meeting at least some rudimentary and primitive cultural wants that family cannot satisfy. *Chokdri* is the chief of a particular *Luku*. Administration of little peccadilloes, maintenance of social customs, religious performances of the *Luku* are under the jurisdiction of *Chokdiri*. Two assistants called 'Khandol' assist a *Chokdri*. *Khandols* generally inform, as and when directed by the *Chokdri*, to all villagers regarding a meeting, social gatherings and some social and cultural functions. The *Chokdri* is selective rather than hereditary. A *Chokdri*, however, is devoid of judicial power. He cannot exercise coercive authority. He has the power to convene a meeting of a *Luku* (village) which is commonly known as '*kokmalaimung*' to settle various issues like theft, robbery, and others. A villager can appeal to the *Moyal Panchay* if one is not satisfied with the decision of a *Chokdri*. A *Chokdri* also maintains a close liaison with *Mayal Panchay* of his region. He himself remains present in all meetings of a *Mayal* and the *Hoda*. If he fails to attend any meeting, he sends one of his '*adongs*' (representative).

A *Moyal* generally consists of some *Lukus* (villages) depending on the size and population and geographical location of villages. A *Moyal Panchay* is elected for 5 years. A *Panchay* can also be re-elected. One must, according to customs, be well conversant with customary rules and social practices in order to be elected as *Moyal Panchay*. I le always keeps a close contact with the *Hoda Okra*. The chief functions of a *Panchay* are to submit annual report of the region to *Hoda* - relating to the number of social judgement, financial collection, etc. He also exercises some judicial powers. His verdict is, however, not final as it can be heard again by the *Hoda Okra*.

The *Hoda* is the apex socio-administrative organization of the Boroks. The supreme head of the *Hoda* is known as *Hoda Okra* or *Muluk Sardar*. From this, the elaborate self- governing institution of the Boroks could be inferred. Other clans and tribes also had similar organizations. All the tribal groups had been living their community lives in then- respective territories under the overall control of the Tripura king. In later years, the post of '*missip*' was created. A '*missip*' acted as liaison officer between the Maharaja and the chief of a clan and a tribe.

The tribal chiefs were all in all in their respective areas and ruled according to their own system. The kings of Tripura ruled the hills through these chiefs. It was through these chiefs that the government officials collected tributes and other requirements. The village disputes were settled in community trials where the chief of the village presided. In political and administrative matters, the chief acted as the link between the king and the tribes. The representative of the tribal chief in the court of the king was known as 'Missip'. But today due to the impact of the modernization process the traditional social and administrative system of the tribal chiefs is no longer in existence.

The form of Government which prevailed in princely Tripura state was autoeratic until the Tripura merger agreement with Indian Union (1949). The king's word was law; and it was sufficient to annul the decrees of the courts, whether the matter was brought up in final appeal or otherwise. His permission was required in every matter. But now the monarchy system of government is no longer in existence due to the direct influence of the modern democratic form of government. This state of affairs has created a significant impact on the socio-cultural and political life of the indigenous tribal society in Tripura.

There were no codified laws. In the past, the courts of Tripura delivered justice according to a primitive system of equity and good conscience and there was no regular judicial procedure. Judicial system was completely in the form of traditional system. People were not acquainted with the modern judicial system in terms of providing justice to the subjects of the princely state. Nowadays, the modern legal system is well-known to the Borok people. The rulers acted as judges, and there was no permanent jail.

The prisoners under trial were kept in a camp known as *Along*. The punishment for crime was severe – criminals were beheaded publicly. But today, this system of punishment for crime is not practiced by the Borok people.

**(17) Custom of *Twitun* and *Lahar*.** Twitun was a feudal type of exaction in kind. In the absence of internal roads and communications, movement in the hills of Tripura was very difficult. To meet this difficulty, the 'Twitun' and the 'Lahar' systems were introduced by the Maharaja of Tripura. Under the system of 'Twitun' when the officials of the king moved into the hills, the hill people had to provide them with guides and labour for carrying the goods without any charge. By the system of 'Lahar' the hillmen had to clear the jungles from the path for the officers in the hill area without any charge. In every village line on the line of their narrow path alternate persons used to take the charge of carrying the luggage giving a relief to the former. Even families were not exempted from serving as *Twitun*. While the villagers were compelled to offer their labour, no question of payment could be raised by them. In 1901 A.D. a provision was made that four anna would - be paid to those who would carry loads of government officers.[53] Nowadys, this traditional system of transport and communication is no longer in existence.

**(18) Rituals Relating to Agriculture and Harvesting:** Like many other indigenous tribal people of India Boroks are very rich in their tradition and culture. Study on the Borok culture is incomplete without a description of the *huh* (Shifting/Jhum or Burn and Slash method of Cultivation) practiced in the hilly areas, for, the entire traditional socio-cultural life of the Boroks is mirrored in the *huk*. Boroks were basically *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivators. This method of cultivation is known as *huk* in Kokborok. *Huk* is perhaps the most primitive method of agriculture. The word 'huk' literally means 'thorough collection. The Boroks enjoy everything they need in their life by practicing 'huk'. Because it is a multi-crop cultivation system. Whatever crops are cultivated and grown in 'huk' are of very high quality. From time immemorial they have been practicing this type of cultivation. Thus, traditionally they are very close to nature and live in nature and their socio-economic and cultural life is based on 'huk'. The concept of 'huk' is so deeply rooted in the life of the Borok people that one can never keep it aside from their way of life. "As the life and culture of the Tripuris revolve through Jhum cultivation, most of the dances and music find their outlets in different activities connected with Jhum."[54]

They entered into regular farming or plough cultivation at a much later time. Plough cultivation was most probably introduced in Tripura in about the fifteenth century i.e. when the first Bengali settlers came to Tripura.[55] Every year they used to shift from place to place in search of newer fertile *jhum* plots. Lewin has described the tribal people of Tripura as a restless tribe shifting every now and then in nomadic fashion.[56] In due course of time, as the population grew, the scarcity of fertile *jhum* land was felt. In their nomadic *jhum* based life, they practically had no property at all. *Jhum* cultivation which is now regarded as a wasteful and uneconomic method did not create any problem in the past because there was hardly any population pressure and there was abundance of virgin land. But with the growth of population and for other reasons, fresh land for doing *jhum* became limited and the productivity had also severely declined. This was mainly due to more intensive jhuming, that was, jhuming of an area before the required period of fallowing was completed. The want of fresh *jhum* land was severely felt in Tripura.

In order to select a field for *Huk or Jhum* cultivation, the Boroks bring a lump of soil of the proposed field; and keep it on bed under a pillow. They believe that they will dream something about the good or bad result of selection of the land for *Jhum*. If the owner of the house dreams any bad dream that night, it is believed that selection of the plot is not right and the plot may be rejected. Fish, good water, marriage, buffalo, elephant etc. are good in dream. But tire, corpse, house building, nude woman, beggar etc. are bad. For good rainfall in proper season, the Boroks particularly the Brus worship the Goddess of water with sacrifice of chicken etc. They believe this will bring rain in time. Hindu Ganga Puja is comparable here. Worship of some minor deities is held for good crops, weather, welfare of live stock, removal of barrenness of women and so on. Boroks never enjoy rice, fruits, vegetables and any other things grown in the Jhum field before 'Balakama ̄puja is performed before *Mailuma-Khuluma*. A form of fertility cult is prevalent among the Boroks where worship of some minor deities are held for good crops, rain, weather, welfare of live stock, removal of barrenness of women and so on.

**(19) Language:** Language differs from comimmity to community and no language is to be considered less developed or inferior to that of any other language. The role that Kokborok language plays in the socio-cultural upliftment of the Borok people is important.

Borok community identity is closely tied to Kokborok language. The boundary of Kokborok being the mother tongue of the Borok people provides a strong base for the Borok specificity and identity making the Boroks distinct from the 'alien' people. Thus Kokborok language reveals a Borok or Tipra's origin, identity and culture. It is also a means for a Borok to interact with other Boroks of the community. Thus, language identity binds the Boroks together.

It is to be noted that the traditional socio-cultural life of the Boroks are undergoing change for which the Boroks are mainly responsible for their identity crisis. For, like "any other communities, identity of the traditional socio-cultural life of the Borok community consists of the ideas, certain beliefs, language, morals, customs, music, dance, literature and artistic achievements that are produced or shared by the Boroks themselves. In this sense, traditional identity of the social life of the Borok community is much to do basically with the individuals of the community from within the society. It has, in a sense, nothing much to do with alien people and with other external factors. It is mainly the moral duty and responsibility of the Boroks themselves to maintain the distinct identity of their traditional social life from within. It is basically the intellectual, material, artistic, moral and spiritual faculties of the Boroks, which sustain their identity.

(20) Songs, dances, music, folktales, weaving designs and instruments, traditional games and sports, diet etc. are also inevitable elements of the socio-cultural life of the Borok people of Tripura.

**(i) Song:** *Jaduni* or *jadu kolija* song is very popular classical folk-song in the Borok traditional socio-cultural life. *Dakhin Rangini* and *Uttor Rangini* are the two major types of Borok classical tunes *of jaduni.* There are various types of Borok folk-songs which are sung at the time of lulling child in cradle, marriage ceremony, shifting cultivation, death ceremony, etc. In fact, Borok socio-cultural life is full of songs right from the cradle to the gravy earth. They are very mirthful people. Singing, playing music and telling stories are an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the Boroks. Singing comes as naturally to the Boroks as breathing.[57] The Borok tribal songs are of various kinds. There are life cycle songs sung at different occasions like birth, marriage, shifting cultivation and death. Some songs deal with different seasons like the spring, the rains etc. and the songs connected with festivals and religions are sung at the time of offering to deities. All these songs are very educative, inspiring and heart touching. They sing in mirth and in sorrow, when alone or in groups, in sunshine and in rain. Various songs are also sung at the time of *Jhum* cultivation, Goriya Puja, putting the babies to sleep, marriage and death etc. They sing various types of Kokborok classical and modern songs during the time of wedding, jhuming and other festivals.

**(ii) Dances:** *Hojagri, Goriya, Lebangbumani, Mosoksulmani, Mamita, Tangbiti, Romomwsamung,* etc. are popular Borok dances which are performed by the Borok people particularly the Borok youth at various seasonal festivals.

**(iii)Folk-tales:** Khumpui, Chethuang, Kuchuk Hasikam, Kuchuk Kherengbar, Kuwaidendra, Nuxvai, Raisok Tanmani, Sikam Choba, Manila Mwsa Chamani. Mayung Kuphur, etc. are some of the major folk-tales of the Borok community.

**(iv)Music:** *Dangdu, Chongpreng, Sarenda, Sumui, Kham,* etc. are some major traditional musical instruments of the Boroks.

**(v) Weaving designs and Instruments:** Following are the unique patterns and designs of Borok weaving and knitting clothes and dresses: Khum, Surang, Dulai, Kamchwlwi, Kutai, Rijai. Ritrak, Rikutu, Sakhok, Lakhuk, Patla, Yaklap, Chanduk, Kamsoi, Kanrwbai, Ribwsa, Rignai, Rituku, Risa, Pakuri, Mokholop, Yakholop etc. are the Borok traditional garments, dresses and other wearing items. Anji, Chamwthwibar, Khamjang, Khuphang-uathwngphang-kuaiphang, Kuaichu bokobom, Kwsakwpra, Malibar, Muikhunchok, Musili, Phantokbar, Salu, Songkai, Takhumtwi, Thaimaikrang, Tokbakbar, Toksa, Toprengsa Khitung, Jirani, Khumbar, Kuaichu, Kuaichu ulla, Kwsapra, Miyong, Monaisora, Natupaliya, Sada/Saidra, Similikyapai, Sorbangi, Temanliya, Thaiplobar, Tokha, Toiling. etc. are Borok weaving designs and patterns. There are more than 240 patterns and designs of Borok weaving and dresses.

**(vi) Games and Sports:** There are about 40 items of traditional games and sports of Boroks.

**(vii) Cuisine:** The curry items which Borok people traditionally cook and eat are called *Muiborok.*[58] There are more than 40 items of Borok curry/food.

**(21) Some Other Beliefs, Rites and Customs:** For knowing future good or evil, a priest expert in divination is employed by the head of a family. Then a pig or a chicken is sacrificed and the priest examines its entrails. Then he makes a prediction about the future of the householder. Some people get possessed by a deity at times and then can make predictions. The Boroks use amulets to get rid of evil spirits and diseases. Various occult practices are there among them for causing injury or even death to the enemy. The enemy's cloth, hair, nail, wine etc. are used for this purpose. Sometimes, the enemy's effigy is made with clay and it is pierced with an arrow or something like it. Spells are muttered in all such rites. A person possessed of some evil spirit called *Swkal* (Witch) is avoided by all. After a puja, the deity is requested to return to his/her own place, if any dishonour is done by children. Then three lines are drawn on earth by the Priest demarcating areas of God and man. In this, a *mantra* (spell) is uttered containing the names of Rama and Laxmana of the Ramayana obviously to produce a strong effect.[59] If a Borok woman has some irregularity in her monthly courses, it is believed that an offering of some articles near the hole of a crab will cure this irregularity. So, offering of such articles is done. It is to be noted here that the clay/soil of the hole of crab is regarded as highly efficacious in some rites on other indigenous communities also.

There is a belief among the Boroks that big trees like mango, jack fruit, black berries etc. provide shelter to evil spirits. So they do not like to have such trees in their lands for fear of evil spirits. Now-a-days this belief is gradually dwindling. They believe in witches called *swkal.* Usually women knowing occult practices and *mantras* to call up spirits become witches. The witches can do any harm to man by their occult rites. So they fear the witches and in the older days they killed them. This belief and practice of killing a witch can be traced to other races of the world also. Joan of Arch of France, who liberated her country from the British yoke, was at last sentenced to death by French court on charge of witch-craft.[60] The Boroks believe that all ailments are caused by evil spirits or dangerous deities. The only way to get rid of diseases is to propitiate these deities or spirits, as the case may be, by making offering to them comprising chicken, pig etc.

Wine has an important role in the life of all Boroks. Wine is offered to the evil spirits to propitiate them and ward off their evil effects. Wine is also paid sometimes as fee for the service of an *Ochai* in lieu of cash. Also, it is given as fee to the *Chokdri* (village headman) when he is requested to hear a complaint against somebody and award justice in the case. Wine is also to be offered to the guests as a mark of honour. Wine was a prestigious drink even in non-tribal societies of the old. It was offered to important persons attending a social gathering. There is a custom of ceremonial friendship making among the Boroks. A man can make only a male friend and a woman only a female friend by this ceremony. This custom is called *Kicking tei Maremarai Khalaimung.* In social banquets men and women have to sit separately. No man is allowed to enter the area of women in the feast and *vice-versa.* All these social and cultural elements cited above can thus enlighten the distinctive identity of the socio-cultural life of the Borok community of Tripura.

## CONCLUSION

It can be said that the central reference point of a value system of the socio-cultural life of the Borok community is the present-day individual members and their lives. For, the socio-cultural tradition of the past, by itself, cannot be its own ground or testimony, and it cannot authenticate itself. In order to sustain their socio-cultural identity, their values have to be realized in the present social context, and they have to be willed, aimed at, and aspired after by the individuals of the community. Without this possibility of constituting the world-view of the community and the possibility of the individuals striving to achieve it, a value system can only be either an item in the "thought- museum" of cultural artifacts.

On the other hand, modernity represents the supremacy of action guiding principle of the present society. For, modernity is not always a rejection of the tradition or the past of the community. It may be total acceptance of the tradition. But it can be possible only if the acceptance of the tradition is conscious, realistic and critical reaffirmation - a regrounding of the socio-cultural values in the context of the present. The essence of modernity is to recognize new situations and phenomena of life, and to review and modify, if necessary, the institutions and the value system in the light of the new phenomena with the ultimate aim of maintaining the maximum possible harmonious balance between different facets of life of the community. It is perpetual preparedness to make socio-cultural changes with a view to obtaining this balance. It seems to be true to me that the gradual de-culturisation of the Boroks, which began in the early twentieth century, has eroded the people's image of themselves as a group with a unique culture.

It may be mentioned here that all forms of socio-cultural-experience depend on self- awareness. For, something to become an image of traditional culture, it has to become expressive of awareness. Indeed, unity is found in self-consciousness, which binds individuals of a particular people, say the Borok people. Whenever people are impressed in a culture by a painting or a philosophy, the really unifying element is the unity of self- consciousness: the unity of the feeling or sense of belongingness that the self is realized through these. The unity of a tradition and culture is not the unity of an objective system but the unity of self-awareness. Tradition, thus, is said to be a symbolic world expressive of spiritual order. It is the self-realisation, which sustains identity of the socio-cultural life of the Borok community. It is the validity of each set of norms for the Borok people whose lives are guided by them and the values they represent is very significant for maintaining their socio-cultural identity.

Therefore, culture becomes the form and achievement of a community, a social tradition. Leaving aside tradition being a memory of the past, tradition serves, like a memory and a value, to create a sense of social and cultural identity of a community. The weakening of the tradition of a community affects the very sustenance of the society which is a fellowship extending in time, a partnership of generations of the community. A community without a past or tradition is without a name and identity. A rootless community cannot be capable of commitment. Certain amount of change is indispensable in any community, but a community identity, for instance, the Borok community identity, without its past will cease to survive. Whatever change that may occur in the community must be based on its original root. There must be a continuity between the past (tradition) and the present (modernity) so as to sustain a genuine community identity. Whatever change that may take place in the Borok community must deeply be rooted in a genuinely integrating 'deep value[61] of its tradition.

As we all know that the socio-cultural life of a particular community which suits the community does not necessarily suit another community. Likewise, the moral norms or codes laid down in a certain community may not necessarily be an important and valuable norm for another community. It logically follows from the above that there is no possible logical ground to say that one's social and cultural identity must be in authority over that of another. The concept of a genuine social and cultural value being concerned primarily with the individual's effort in uplifting his own mental, physical, moral and spiritual world, this process would be the same with another individual, belonging to a different community. So there is no logical possibility for any community to establish a hierarchical form of cultures over its contemporary societies in a true sense.

In fact, the social and cultural features coupled with history of its community bind the Boroks of Tripura together and help them to retain a distinct socio-cultural identity of their own. Language, culture, and ancestral history are the most fundamental determining factors responsible for identity formation of the Borok community of Tripura. Therefore, they still continue to exhibit and maintain their own distinct worldview on the basis of which they assert their distinct and separate social and cultural identity. However, the existence of all these cultural manifestations and forms of indigenous socio-cultural lives of the Borok community cannot guarantee the survival of their community for a long time. But, the fact remains that the traditional means of production, community-based systems of government, and communal ceremonies have persisted for few thousand years. This is an indication of the capacity to adapt and survive. But today, the Borok indigenous people in Tripura face the same challenges as in the past: marginalization, inequality, violence and exploitation. They must face these challenges while maintaining their identify and cultural heritage. For the agencies and establishments in charge of development, the challenge is to reduce the factors accounting for the poverty and social injustice in the indigenous communities and to include the ethnic dimension into their actions for the development of these peoples. It is important to understand what reconstruction entails and what is necessary for its success. Reconstruction is a must, and an attempt is necessary to restore the ancestral histories, languages, traditions, folkways, beliefs, worldviews and socio-cultural identity of the Borok community of Tripura and bring them forth at per with the react of the modern world.

## NOTES

1. The meaning of the word 'Twipra' in Kokborok (mother tongue of the Boroks) as mentioned in J. E. Webster's *North-Eastern Bengal District*

*Gazetteers* (1910), is 'the country towards sea'. But the word 'Tripura' is a *sanskritised* form of the original name 'Twipra'. It is to be noted here that the word 'Tripura' unlike 'Twipra' has comparatively less affinity with Borok people. On the other hand, the term 'Twipra' has not only linguistic ties with its aboriginal people, Boroks (Tipras), but also has its own original and historical significance and meaning. Tripura is a tiny state of North-Eastern region of India, bounded by-Cachar district of Assam and the Mizo Hills of Mizoram in the eastern side, by Comilla and a part of Noakhali districts of Bangladesh in the western side, by the districts of Chittagong and a part of Noakhali in the southern side, and by the Sylhet district of Bangladesh in the northern side.

2. Chatterjee, S.K., *Kirata-Jana Krti,* The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1974. p. 46.
3. Hrangkhawl, Molsom, Darlong, Halam, Bongcher, Kuki, Kaipeng, Ranglong, Chorai, Mog, Garo, Chakma, Khasi, Lushai, Bhutias, Bhil, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santal. Chaimal and the like. Out of these tribes, Munda, Orang, Santal, Bhil, Lepcha and Bhutia are numerically insignificant, socially isolated, and politically unorganized.
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6. In the chronicles of Twipra Kingdom called 'Rajmala' it is written that it was during the reign of Digbijoy, a Tipra or Borok king that the Twipra Era was introduced in commemoration of the victory and extension of the Twipra Kingdom upto the west bank of river Ganga over some parts of Bengal. On 197 page of the first part/volume of the '*Rajmala*' of Twipra Kingdom, it is written that Twipra Era or *Tring* was introduced in 590 A.D. This 'Rajmala' was written in Kokborok scripts called 'Koloma' by Durlabhendra Chantai (a Tipra head priest of the Kingdom) and was translated in Sanskrit by Pandit Prabar Baneshwar and Shukreshwar and edited by Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhusan. (Agartala, Tripura) in 1336 Twipra Era (i.e. 1926 A.D.).
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18. *Ibid.* p. 84.
19. Singh, Yogendra., *Modernisation of Indian Tradition,* Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1986. 175.
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22. Singh, K.S. (Ed)., *People of India: Tripura,* Vol. XL1, Anthropological Survey of India, Seagull, Calcutta, 1996, p. 186.
23. Hunter, W.W.; op. cit. p.483, See also R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson: *Chittagong Hill Tracts,* op. cit, p.36.
24. Akhanda, Anugatamani, *Marriage System of Tribal Societies of Tripura,* Tribal Research Institute, Govt, of Tripura, Agartala, 1995, p. 5.
25. *Ibid.* p. 5.
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# History and Culture of the Kukis

## INTRODUCTION

**The Kuki tribe is one of the major tribes settled in the North-Eastern India, particularly in the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. It is not an easy task to re-construct the history of the Kuki tribe since, apart from the tales and anedotes of mass migration of the people from one place to another, there are no historical records available beyond a few centuries. This is mainly so due the absence of a Central Authority under whom several Kuki tribal groups submitted themselves as constituent segments in an organized hierarchical order. However, British anthropologists, colonial bureaucrats, army officers, in their writings at different periods of time collectively called them "KUKI", who were found occupying certain areas in Tripura, North Cachar Hills District, Lushai Hills District, Naga Hills District, Manipur, etc., in India and in Arakan and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Similarly, some groups of Kuki tribes are given the name "CHIN" when they are in Burma. They did so exclusively in view of their homogeneity in regard to their culture, customs, tradition, rites, rituals, beliefs, linguistic affinity, uniformity in their system of administration, method of cultivation, etc. However, after Lushai Expedition in the Lushai Hills District in 1872-73, use of the term "KUKI" was superseded by LUSHAI, the dominant clan which took prominent role against the British during the Expedition.**

**Thus, Shakespear[1] in his work on LUSHAI KUKI CLANS divided the entire Kuki tribes into six groups as detailed below:**

1. In the first group, the Lushai Clans, based on Thangura the pedigree of all the living Chiefs who were accurately established to have been included under six lines of Chiefs. They are -

(i) Rokhum, (ii) Zadeng, (iii) Thangluah, (iv) Pallian, (v) Rivung and (vi) Sailo.

2. In the second group are included the Clans[2] that are included under the term "*Lushai*" though not *Lusheis*, having been absorbed. They are -

(i) Chawte (Chothe in Manipur), (ii) Chongthu, (iii) Hnamte, (iv) Kawlni, (v)Kawhring, (vi) Khiangte, (vii) Ngente, (viii) Rentlei, (ix) Roitc, (x) Vangchhia and (xi) Zawngte.

3. In the third group are included Clans[3] which, though not absorbed, have been much influenced by the Lusheis. They are -

(i) Fanai, (ii) Ralte, (iii) Paihte or Vuite, (iv) Rangte (Gangte in Manipur).

4. In the fourth group are included the Old Kuki Clans.[4] They are -

(i) Aimol, (ii) Anal, (iii) Chawte, (iv) Chiru, (v) Kolhen, (vi) Kom, (vii) Lamgang, (viii) Purum, (ix) Tikhup (Mantak), (x) Vaiphei, (xi) Rhangkol, (xii) Khelma, (xiii) Biate and (xiv) Hrangchal (Haliam).

5. In the fifth group are included the Thadou Clans[5] among whom were -

(i) Doungel, (ii) Sitlhou, (iii) Singson, (iv) Kipgen, (v) Haokip, (vi) Chongloi, (vii) Hangshing and some non-Thadou groups who have been absorbed among the above mentioned Thadous having for all practical purposed embraced all customs, culture, language, religious beliefs, rites, rituals, etc. Yet, they are the only groups who do not claim to be the descendants of Chongthu with a tradition of *Khul* or *Khur* origin, instead, claiming 'Celestial origin'. They are - (i) Lianthang and his brother Thlangum(Lhangum), and (ii) Lunkim and his brother, (iii) Changsan who also claimed to have survived the 'Thimzin' trauma.

6. In the sixth group are included only the Lakhers[6] or Mara. They are closely allied to the Southern Chins. They call themselves "Mara" Lakher being the name used by the Lushais. The Chins call them Zo, and the Arakan name for them is Klongshai.

The languages of all the above clans are very similar[7] As per the classification of Grierson, these languages are termed "KUKI-CHIN".

YET, he said that "*Meitei-Chin* would be a better appellation, as the whole group can be sub-divided into two sub-groups, the Meitheis (Manipuris) and the various tribes which are known under the name of Kuki-Chin" are considered as belonging to the Burmese branch of the Tibeto- Burman family which he sub-divided as follows :

(i) Meithei or Manipuri.

(ii) Chin Languages :

1. Northern Group: Thado, Sokte, Siyin, Ralle and Paite or Vuile;
2. Central group : Tashon, Lai, Lakher, Lushai, Banjogi and Pankhu;
3. Old Kuki group: Rhangkhol, Bete (Biate), Mallam, Langrong, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Lamgang, Kolren(Koihen), Kom, Purum, Mhar (Hmar or Khawtlang) and Cha;
4. Southern group : Chinme, Welaung, Chinbok, Yindu, Chinbon, Khyang or Sho, Khami.

Under the situation thus obtained, it should be understood that the term KUKI would be used in this paper to denote the clans mentioned above collectively. All the same, it must also be noted that while KUKI as a common nomenclature has rapidly declined, abandoned and disused by a good number of them, MIZO as a new phenomenon has become increasingly popular.

## BACKGROUND

The difficulty one may encounter in the study of history of the Kukis is the absence of historical evidences. Whatever sources that could be counted as historical, belong to the post-colonial period. Thus, lack of conventional data is the greatest hindrance to tracing the early history of the Kukis in a precise manner. Secondly, heterogeneity of the Kuki society as is briefly narrated above is another limitation. Therefore, the division of historical periods into ancient, medieval and modern is not possible. Despite this, attempts are being made to construct history of the Kukis. In doing so, sources of history may be classified as *Oral, Inscription, Literature* and *Archival* for the purpose of this paper:

## I. Oral Sources

Romila Thapar[8] contended that sources of history are necessarily divided into historical and traditional so as to make history well founded and authentic. But in the case of history of the Kukis this may not wholly be possible. Mainly the Kukis did not have their own scripts to reduce their languages in written form earlier than later part of the 19th century so as to use the conventionally recorded indigenous sources of their history. The only feasible means, therefore, is the traditional non-conventional sources, such as, folklore, folksong, beliefs, superstitions, ceremonies, hymns, rites, rituals, etc., which are, as Bhattacharjee[9] contended, always important for the people as they reflect on the needs and aspirations of the common people at various points of time. Under this situation, oral traditions are the only indispensable sources.

### *(a) Khul Tradition*

Traditionally, all Kuki tribes claimed that they came out of a very big cave called '*Chhinlung*' by the Dulian (Mizo) speaking tribes. '*Sinlung*' by the Hmars, '*Khur*' by the old Kuki tribes, such as, Aimol, Anal, Chothe, Chiru, Maring, Lamgang, Kom, etc., and '*Khul*' by the Vaiphei, Paite, Gangte, Simte, Zo, Thadou and cognate groups of New Kukis[10] etc., with the exception of Changsan, Lhangum, Thangeo, Lunkirn, etc., who claimed that they were of "Celestial Origin". By this, we know that the Kuki tribes in general were the people of "Cave Origin". This tradition is supported by folksongs and legends that were handed down from generations together. One such folksong as rendered in Rnglish version runs as follows (only one stanza):

My mother land, famous Khul,
Home of my own ancestors,
Could it be called back like Chongzil.
Home of my own ancestor

### *(b) Khampat Tradition*

Khampat is located at its traditional or original location close to the Manipur border, and was live oldest town ever built by the Kukis. The town was said to be divided into more than ten sectors. The Central block was considered as the palace site where the King or the ruler was believed to have resided. The Kukis had to move from this place due to pressures from the enemies coupled with the on-going process of movement of population to the west.

As evidence of their having sojourned at the place with a firm belief that they would reoccupy this place one day[11], they planted a Banyan Tree at the palace site so that it would bear witness to the effect that when one of the branches thereof touches the ground it would be indicative of fulfilment of their cherished hope.

It is a fact, believe it or not, that Khampat is, as of now, being inhabited by the Kukis and that by the time a section of Kukis returned to Myanmar and settled in the areas in the beginning of 20th century A.D., the branches of the Banyan Tree thus planted had already touched the ground.[12]

Now many a people assume that this was a manifestation of fulfilment of the prophecy forecasted by their forefathers as the folktale related above was handed clown from generation to generation.

### (c) *The Lost Tribe Tradition*

This aspect of historical tradition has direct relevance to the culture, customs, customary laws, etc., of the people concerned as shown under "Modern Phase' (ii) Israelite Concept.

## II. Inscriptions

For a historic period where written documents are not available, epigraphic evidence to make history authentic is indispensable. But no such dependable inscription has been discovered for a genuine early history of the Kukis either in Manipur, or Myanmar or Mizoram, except the one recently discovered at Suangpuilawn, about 150 kilometres North-East of Aizawl, where an inscription on a stone tablet could not be properly deciphered as yet. The same is now installed at State Museum, Aizawl. According to some, the inscription was either in the old Meitei script or the old Bengali script. When it is properly deciphered it is expected that history of the Kukis might be different from what is present.[13]

In addition, there is one copper plate inscription wherein the name of Kukisthanan (land of Kukis) written. Suhas Chatterjee contended that Dharmadhar (Swadharmapa, or Chengpha) was the Raja or Kailagadh, who invited a Kanauj Brahmin, Nidhipati, to his principality and granted him real estate as Brahmottar land How was the land given to him was inscribed in the copper plate. At the second verse of the Sanskrit couplet ran as follows-[14]

> *Sri Nidhipati Vipraya Vastsya Gotraya Dharmine, Prahayang Longai Kukisthanan Pratichyan Gopala nade.*

According to Chatterjee, the English rendering of the verse runs as follows :

> To Sri Nidhipati, the Vatsya Gotra Brahmin, the land bound in the east the Longai and Kukiland and in the west the Gopola river.

The land grant to Nidhipati was dated as 1195.[15]

## III. Literature

Tradition has it that once the Kukis were given a book (script), but due to carelessness, a dog carried it away. That was how they lost the script. The Roman script now used was introduced only in the late 19th century with the advent of Christianity coupled with introduction of western education among the Kukis. Therefore, availability of literary evidence as source of Kuki history is seanty. The *Rajamala* or the Chronicle of Tripura Rajas may be cited as one of the sources.

According to *Rajamala*, there arose a quarrel, between him and the Kukis over the possession of white elephant[16] during the reign of Dhanya Manikya (A.D. 1490 - 1515) Therein, it was also narrated as to how the Raj Kumar, the 57th in succession fell in love with a Kuki woman which incurred the fury of the wife of Siva[17] who kicked the Kuki woman violently that caused break of her neck. The *Rajamala* further recorded that there was an alliance between the Kuki warriors and the Raja of Udaipur against Jajarpha, the 74th Raja of Tripura who invaded Rangamati (Udaipur).[18]

The *Rajamala* of Tripura was not the only important source of information for the history of Kukis. The Hindu literatures, such as, the epics, the Puranas, etc., have so much potential historical evidences that should invariably contribute to the reconstruction of early history of the Kukis, because in them we find references to the Chins as Kukis, Chins and even Lushais[19] Analytical study of these literatures would immensely help us in understanding more of the Kukis and their history.

## IV. Archival Sources or Contemporary Records

The annexation of erstwhile Lushai Hills District of Assam by the British in 1890 and conclusion of the Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919 in Manipur and Chin Hills, Burma, marked the beginning of modern period of the history of the Kukis, which covet s, as is the case with all parts of India, till it attained independence from the yoke of British imperialist regime in August, 1947.

During the process of consolidation and analytical investigation into the indigenous form of government, history and culture, the British did commendable service to the Kukis when they brought out a huge mass of historical materials of immense value for which one cannot but thank the British imperialism. These materials are now available in the National Archives, New Delhi (though partially closed), State Archives, West Bengal, Kolkata, Record Office, Dispur, Assam and Record Office, Aizawl (known as State Archives), etc.

## Early Phase of Kuki History

Now, in view of preceding paragraphs it is clear that the KUKIs are known under different names, such as, 'Chin' in Chin Hills, Myanmar and 'Lushai' in Lushai Hills which was replaced by 'Mizo' ultimately though the people of the same groups who bear different names as per geographical areas occupied mentioned above, the name KUKI is still maintained in Manipur, Nagaland, North Cachar Hills of Assam, Tripura and Arakan and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

Most scholars think that Kukis made their first appearance in China. Burkitt[20] thought that the later Stone Age people made their movements from China to Central Asia and thence to Europe. Therefore, while searching for the original habitat, attention is focused on China, particularly the southern part, because our tradition points to it. The Kuki tradition has it that 'Chhinlung' or 'Sinlung', or 'Khur' or 'Khul' is their original habitat.[21] 'Chhinlung' or 'Khul' is believed to be located somewhere in Szechuan Province in southern China[22].

## Burma Phase

They are grouped as Tibeto-Burman Family[23] Chins are cakin to Kukis an Myanmar 'Kukis' are known as Chins. They came to Burma in the second half of the century A.D. But Luce[24] puts in between the 4th and the middle of the 8th century A.D.

According to Lehman, Luce derived the 4th century from the fact that the Chins by this time had already used the word 'tangka' (coinage) which, is believed to be name of a Gupta coin of India. It is firmly believed that the coin was brought to the East by Samudra Gupta (C.320-380 AD) in the middle of the fourth century A.D.[25] The 8th century A.D. is, however, derived from the fact that the ancient and route used by the Caravans and traders from China to India was not mentioned in literature. This convinced Luce to believe that the route was presumably closed after AD 300 until 750 and as such no major westward movement was noticed, otherwise it would have been recorded in the annals or literature.[26] He, therefore, strongly believed and conch that most of the hill people arrived in Myanmar between the two dates. Harvey has, however, believed that many of the immigrants must have sealed in Burma before Christian era.[27] It may, therefore, be concluded that the Chin peoples occupied the present Chin Hills before the end of the 8th century A.D.

From the account given above, it may be conjectured that the Kukis came to Myanmar along with the people who are akin to them. In all probabilities, Kukis linked with the "Chins" by which name some scholars refer to the Kukis.

## The North-East Phase

The North-East India has been the seat of multi-ethnic population since time immemorial and is, therefore, known for its diverse ethnic mosaic from the waves of immigrant racial elements[28] Kiratas, Cina and other primitive tribes were earlier inhabitants[29] "Kirata" means wild non-Aryan tribes connected with Cinas and the Chinese[30], and people living in the cave of the mountain according to MacDonald and Keith[31], and are the Mongoloid origin who migrated from South-east Asia and Burma according Sanskrit term.[32]

The epics and the Puranas refer to the 'Cinas' as Kuki-Chins or Lushai[33]. The Geography of Ptolemy, a work of about A.D. 150 deals with the geography and peoples of other parts of Assam. But many of the words and places mentioned are difficult to identify. The word Kirrhadae, for example, is identified as Kiratas. In the same way another work of the Greeks - *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*[34] which mentions about Assam in different descriptions also refers a number of tribes as Kirrhadae.[35] In this connection, the work of G.E. Gerini, *Researcheson Ptolemy's Geography*, is commendable. He rightly identifies Ptolemy's Alosong with Shi Hong and Tiladai with the Kuki-Chin.[36] Tiladai was located to the north of the Moirandos near the Garo Hills and Sylhet.[37]

In the Mahabharata, the Puranas and Tantras, the ancient. Assam is referred to as Pragjotisha and Kamarupa respectively. The Mahabharata mentions one Bhagadatta as one of the four sons of Naraka. He was a powerful ruler who ruled in the west. The Sabha Parvan, relates the war between Bhagadatta and Arjun. In the war, the latter defeated the former after eight days of war.[38] It also mentions that Bhagadatta had a host of Kirats and Chins and other numerous warriors who dwelt on the sea cost.[39] The Hindu literature like the two epics and so many others makes references to the Kiratas.[40] About the proper home land of the Kiratas, the *Vishnu Purana* says that the Kiratas are in the east of India.[41] Therefore, Chatterjee concludes, "the Kiratas were known to the Hindu world as a group of peoples whose original home was in the Himalayan slopes and in the mountains of the East."[42] The history of the arrival in India (North-East India) of the various Mongoloid groups speaking dialects of the Sino-Tibetan family is not known but their presence in India was noted by the tenth century B.C. when the Veda books were compiled.[43] The result of their participation in the history and culture of India in the areas where they had established themselves, has been their assimilation and absorption with the other peoples.

The migrations of the Mongoloid tribes to Assam took place through the North-Eastern and Southern routes of Assam from Burma.

They entered Assam through the courses of the river Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and Menam. Some of them also entered Assam through mountain passes of Assam and Burma through the north-east and south-east.[44] When they arrived in Assam the Mon-Khmer tribes had already occupied some hilly regions but they had been driven out later by the newly arrived tribes into different directions.[45] Therefore, some occupied the foot hills of the Himalayans from Sadiya to the Punjab in the West, and the rest occupied the hills of Assam such as the Garo Hills, Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, Khasi Hills and so on. It was only after their distribution and occupation of particular areas that they came to be known as Nagas, Bodos, Kukis, Khasis and so on and the areas of their occupation were known by their tribal names.[46] The Sesatae of the Periplus and the Besadae of Ptolemy were also the same hill people of Assam allied to the Garos, Nagas and the Lushai-Kukis or the Mishmis.

There is also evidence to indicate that the Kukis had already arrived in Tripura late in the twelfth century A.D. In the history of Tripura mention is made that oncc Raja Dharmadhar of Kailagadh invited Nidhipati, a Kanauj Brahmin to his court and granted him and estate, known in history as Brahmottar land. The inscription in the copper plate marking the event bears the name of Kuki-land. The land bounded in the east of Longoi (Langkaih) river and the date is mentioned as 1 195 A.D.[47] The theory is that the Kukis, who are known in Tripura as Halam, sneaked into Tripura due to ethnic pressures, possibly perhaps, long before the coming of Palian and Zadeng ruling clans of Zahmuaka who had been pushed down by the Sailo Chiefs of the same ancestor. They entered Tripura not from Lower Burma, but from Upper Burma passing through the area known as Lushai Hills.

The New Kukis are believed to have come from the same route followed by the Old Kukis. We cannot place them far behind the Kukis of the first batch. Hence, they are said to have arrived in the land in the period between fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D.[48]

The last batch of migration, which were identified as 'Lushai', like the first two groups, consisted of many clans. The most prominent among them was the Lusei tribe of the Sailo clan. They were the direct descendants of Thangura who is believed to have existed in 1580 A.D. As noted before, Palian and Zadeng groups came before the Sailos and they are said to have come in 1610 A.D.[49] The Sailo clans are believed to have migrated to Mizoram beginning from the second half of the seventeenth century and might have continued till the beginning of the nineteenth century, McCall has asserted that Lallula occupied Mizoram around 1810 A.D.[50] Whatever the case may be, from the dates given above, a genealogy of the Sailo Chiefs and others and their respective periods, may be worked out. Though this may seem to be a difficult task, an attempt has to be made to string together the story of ancient ruling clans of the Kukis.

## The Manipur Phase

As for [he Kukis of Manipur, Johnstone[51] convincingly contended that the Kukis were inhabitants of Manipur since time immemorial and commented with appreciation that his predecessor. McCulloch, was 'Cool and Considerate that having confirmed that the new wave of Kuki immigrants came to Manipur m 1845 m great numbers were mainly with the main intention to secure laud for cultivation that prompted him to place them at various strategic places all over the Hill areas of Manipur to meet the quest of Kukis for land who had no intention whatsoever with conquest of land. This became a very convenient policy framework to create 'Buffer Group' out of the Kukis as 'human shield' to protect the Raja of Manipur and the British from their enemies. The Government of India in Bengal appreciated highly and created Kuki 'levies' at various strategic places. Johnstone further praised him stating that McCulloch extended financial assistance to the Kukis from his private pocket money that won the confidence of the Kukis and their allegiance, making themselves available by his side whenever their services were required. These complementary notings were fully corroborated from McCulloch's[52] own accounts of the Kukis in Manipur.

## Modern Phase

### *(i) Concept of 'Zo' (Jo) Unification*

At this juncture, it may be relevant to briefly describe the meaning of 'Jo' which was generally considered as necromancers and sorcerers for which the Burmese were not accorded ill treatment for fear of being revenged with some enchantment.[53] In this connection it is significant to note that Father Sangermano was sent as a missionary in 1782 who arrived in Rangoon in July, 1783 and proceeded to Ava directly the same year. Herein, it is pertinent to refer to the letter from Vum llau (Vum Ko Hau) to Haokholet.[54]

In this letter he emphasized the fact that the nomenclature of the 'Kukis' and 'Zos' should be retained. There was no iota of doubt on the truth of their nomenclatures, in doing so, he indicated the equations between 'Mizo' and 'Zomi' stating that more than 200 years ago a most learned Italian missionary had recorded the fact that the 'Kuki and 'Zo' people were either Mizo or Zomi. These people lived on the west of the Chin Mountains between 20° and 30° longitude and 21° and 30° N latitude and that the people of the area was called 'Jo' who, in course of time, became Burmese.

He further claimed that he read most of the books concerning the 'Jo' from the British Museum, the National Library of France, the Museums in the Hague and Leyden and Utracht, and also the Indian Oflice Library, the London Library and National Library of Scotland in Glasgow wherefrom he could confirm that father Sangermano was the first author to record the word 'Jo' (Zo).

He also stated that in the Chin Hills Gazetteer written by Sir Bertram, S. Carey, and H.N. Tuck, Superintendent, Government Printing Press, Burma, threw some truths of the confusion regarding "Our closer connection with the Chins and Lushais (during the last five years which does not appear to have "taught us anything more than we knew twenty years ago of the ethnology of tribes". Yule in 1855 described the Chins and Lushais as of Indo-Chins kindred, known as Kuki, Kekes (to be pronounced as Chins), and by many more specific names."

In consideration of the above contention, it may be concluded that the tribes who are known broadly as Kuki, Zou and Mizo in Manipur reveal a common origin in their customary laws and many prevalent traditions. Such concept equating Mizo and Zomi will not be incorrect or an underestimation of their socio-political or religious status.

In this connection, the terms 'Zo', 'Kuki' and 'Mizo' signify a common social and cultural group of people. This idea is not a new thing. It is a global phenomenon caught under the ethnic explosion the world over. This had been termed as "*political creed*"[55] Instead, it could be more appropriately termed as '*ethnic consciousness*'.

### *(ii) Concept of Hebrew Origiu(Israelite Concept)*

While tracing the origin of the early history of the Kukis, one of the sources that cannot be overlooked or sidelined as totally baseless and unfounded, is the culture and tradition which claim that the Kukis are descendants of a tribe of Israel in the House of Cphraim, the tenth tribe. According to the Old Testament of the Bible, the Israelites were the chosen people with whom God entered into a covenant.[56] But the people were unfaithful to God and consequently God dispersed them among the people from one end of the earth to the other and there they served gods of wood and stone which neither they nor their fathers had known.[57]

In doing so, God dispersed the Israelites as a punishment by means of Assurians and Nabukadnazzar, King of the Babylon in 720 B.C. and 587 B.C. respectively. This was beginning of the diaspora of the Israelites, the dispersion of the Jews to the different part of the world, This lasted into the 20th century AD. The Jews also came to the east in ancient times[58]. By following the foothills of Himalaya the 'lost tribes' then arrived in China. According to one estimates, when Israel attained Independence in 1948, about 5000 Jews migrated back to Israel and have settled in the Kubbutz.[59]

On the basis of culture, tradition, customary laws, etc., it could be identified that the Kukis/Mizos have Israelite religious and social connections. The culture, customary laws, etc. are important in these groups as their identity is based upon them. As a result of this, the Welsh Presbyterian Church banned all revivalist manifestations, including 'listening to voices, prophecy and speaking unknown tongues'.[60] This ban could not, however, be enforced. Revivalism has remained a potent force in religious practice. Impact of Revival has been still more dramatic. McCall commented that revivalist movement was fairly widespread and that the Missions were trying faithfully to keep it within the bounds of decency.[61] In a progressive way these groups have retained their past culture, which have got manifested as a living tradition.

On the basis of existing culture, tradition, customary laws, religious belief systems, rites and rituals, some groups of Mizos have been identified as the children of 'Manmasi' The term itself is distorted form of 'Manassch' of the Israelites who was the son of Joseph.

In the backdrop of such a situation, Lalbiaktluanga[62] recorded that a revivalist named Saichhunga from Hlimen village claimed that Mizos were 'the lost tribals of Israel', This statement was confirmed as true by Chala of Buallian village in 1951 which was substantiated by those who accepted the claims[63] saying,

> In the year 1936 the word of the spirit of our Lord came to Pu (honorific title similar to 'ShrT in Hindi or 'Sir' in English) Kapa and Pu Saichhuma, telling them that "we are Israel" Also in 1946 the same message was received by Pu Chala of Buallawn village. Henceforth from every part and every corner of Mizoram we cried longing for our homeland, Israel ... and searched every possible way for contacting Israel". It is observed that while Liabiaktluanga speaks of one Saichhunga, Benjamin calls this man 'Saichhuma'. Similarly, Lalbiaktluanga tells us that Chala of Bualawn "confirmed" Saichhunga's statement in 1951 as against which Benjamin offers 1946 as the appropriate year. These contradicting names and years need to be rectified.

From this account and several others it is clear that the connection with the Israelites had not been realized until "the word of the Lord came out to our prophets since 1936", even though this revelation explains a history that would stretch back over two and a half thousand years. In this connection it has to be understood that as per historic events the biblical Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyrians in 720 B.C. Its inhabitants were taken into exile and banished from history The fate of these people, "the Lost Tribes of Israel", has inspired many legends and much wild conjecture.[64]

We may sum up our account of the history of the Kukis as follows:

> That, historically, the Kukis are a Mongoloid race of the Tibeto-Burman group of tribes and that the mountainous

region of Southern China the original home of these people is unquestionable because their tradition, myths, legends and the historical facts based on research all point to it. But it is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to definitely give the correct date of their settlement and beginning of their migration from them.

Having found their new homes in Burma, the Kukis are believed to have been there for a number of centuries. Unlike other *Kiratas* who reached Assam following the course of the Brahmaputra river and still others who reached the other hill areas through mountain passes, the Kukis arrived in their present habitats. The evidence is that Kukis arrived here from the Chin Mills of Burma through the present Chawnchhim popularly known as Champhai. In Chin Hills of Burma till now there are so many Kuki villages and the main route appears to be the land route via what is popularly known as Rihdil, the Rih lake. It is certain that when they moved westward they moved in small number. One group under the command of one Chief moved from one place to another.

Among the Mongoloid tribes whom the classical writers and modern authors refer to as *Kiratas* as having found their ancient settlements in the plains and the hills of Assam with whom the Ahoms had contact, the Kukis had no part to play because they were distinctly different from them. But, it is certain that some sections of the Chin group might have had contact with them because many accounts are given about the Chins in Hindu literature. The Kuki groups who are now found in North Cachar of Assam are those, as pointed out earlier, who migrated from Tripura *via* the Cachar valley and finally arrived in the hills. They had been employed in the Barak valley as *Kuki Levy* by the Cachar Rajas in putting down their adversaries.

## CULTURE OF THE KUKIS

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society, says Tylor.[65] Malinawski[66] that culture is the handiwork of man and the medium through which he achieves his end. And, in like manner, Mazumdar propounds culture as the sum total of human achievements, material as well as non-material, capable of transmission, by tradition and communication, vertically as well as horizontally.[67]

Thus, we can think about certain characteristics of culture that may briefly be given as follows:

(i) that culture is an acquired quality, learned through socialization, habits and thoughts;
(ii) that it is social and not individual heritage, a social product which is shared by most members of the group;
(iii) that culture is idealistic, embodying the ideas and norms of a group, a sum-total of the ideal patterns and norms of behaviour of a group;
(iv) that it is the total social heritage that links with the past which endures because it lives in culture passing from one generation to another through traditions and customs;
(v) that it fulfils those ethical and social needs of the groups which are ends in themselves;
(vi) that it is an integrated system, its various parts being integrated with each other and any new element introduced is also integrated; and
(vii) that language being the chief vehicle of culture, living not only in the present but also in the past and future, it transmits what was learnt in the past and enables further to transmit the accumulated wisdom.

Now, as has been sufficiently made clear in the preceding pages the Kukis are of Tibeto-Burman Family group of people. They arrived the Chin Hills of Burma from Southern China as a result of population movements. They lived there for centuries and formed themselves into a homogeneous group of varying clans. They developed their culture into different dimensions.

Chieftainship was instituted as a single source of authority in society. They also developed their economic system adopting the method of cultivation called "Slash and burn", the oldest method of cultivation and the most dreaded system the world over today. They cannot do away with it till this day among the Kukis wherever they might settle, either in the Chin Hill, Burma (Myanmar). Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, North-Cachar Hills in Assam and Arakan and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. The reason is not far to seek. It is due to non-availability of better alternatives. Their religious life also improved considerably with innovative rites, rituals, methods of propitiations, etc., to the existing ones. The cultural life of the people showed all round marked development from their rudimentary stage of social institutions which are components of culture.

The humming activities of year round tribal life among the Kukis revolve within the ambit of earning bread for survival without consideration for future growth and development on an agro-based economic system which has no place for the concept of 'Saving'. Such a life of routine nature becomes obviously monotonous which must find expression in various forms of social celebrations to give vent to their longing for a life away from sacrosanct. In doing so, their structural functions of life in the specify manifested themselves in the social institutions that are major components of their culture. Two such institutions are briefly given below.

## I. Sawm or Zawlbuk (Bachelors' Dormitory)

"Sawm" or "Zawlbuk" is an institution[68] of the youth which concerns only with able-bodied young boys of the village. It is a bachelors' dormitory in which all the young boys of the village sleep together at night. The nature of hostility and practice of intertribal feuds necessitate existence of this institution so that in times of emergency the services of all able-bodied men might be available at short notice.[69] They have to offer their free and compulsory services to the Village from external dangers. In times of peace they render every possible service to the Village community whenever required. Moreover, it is an institution for recreation of the young boys. In the 'Sawm', younger boys are taught all sorts of things from cutting jokes to taking responsibilities. Stones are told by the elder members and sometimes topics ranging from girls to war become subject matters of great interest. This institution is also connected with the '*Thih-Kheng*' office because the efficient mobilization of the village youth for defence depends mainly upon the ability of the '*Thih-kheng*' to produce weapons. In a nutshell, it may be equated with modern system of 'Informal Education' and may as well be likened with that of Defence and Home Departments of modern administration.

The Kuki society is such that during the days when intertribal feuds were part of their way of life, every able-bodied youth of a village slept together so that they might be readily available for deployment in times of emergency. '*Sawm*' or '*Zaulbuk*' is also considered a place of learning. Boys of different age-groups are assigned various jobs and other sundry chores. The boys of younger age-groups learn things from the older groups. They also learn social customs and manners. It serves as an institution of learning, discipline and other essential characters necessary for a man in future life. It has thus been considered as a very essential part of the village administration among the Kukis. This is an organisation responsible for mobilization of the services of the youngmen to meet exigencies of situations In this connection Roy[70] describes the bachelor's organisation as:

> ... archaic form of economic, social and religious organisation. It must have been effective economic organisation for purposes of food gathering a useful seminary for training youngmen in their social and other duties, and an institution for magico-religious observances calculated to secure success in hunting and to augment the preventive power of the youngmen so as to increase the number of hunters in the tribe...

Thus, the young boys of the village are concentrated at a place for emergency service, in this connection a story is current, which runs as follows:

> There was a time when every tribe was scared of the Pawis (Lakhers) because of their ferocity in warfare. But the Sitlhou Chief of Jampi village, the head of all the Sitlhou clan of the Thadotis, arranged things in such a way that he and his collateral brothers must not move out from their place for fear of the Pawis[71]. He asked his younger two junior collateral Chieftains of Lhungtin and Aiyang villages belonging to the Hangsing and Chongloi clans to remain in their present villages on condition that he as a senior collateral cousin

would remain together with them. So, the three villages forming a confederacy remained in union where they were based. Now, having stood their ground unitedly, Lhungtin and Aiyang villages acting as buffers between the Pawis and the Jampi village, became the thorn in the flesh to the Pawis, who could not any longer stand in the face of such combined force of the three confederate villages. In order to relent the situation and with a view to living side by side in pcacc and amity, the Pawis sought for the concurrence of the Jampi Chief to pacify his junior collateral two cousins of Lhungtin and Aiyang Chiefs. As a token of peace and amity of the proposed pact, the Pawi Chief came to him pleading that the Pawis were no longer able to live in peace because of fear for 'Your brethren Singhangs[72] (Hangsings). Please be kind and pacify them and ask them not to trouble us any more, so that we all might live in peace as good neighbours." In proposing such a peace pact with the three collateral brethren Chiefs, the Pawis brought two shields to be used in front and back - '*Lum Le Phaw*' - one big type bead, called '*Khi-chang*', one spear, known as '*Tiengcha*', one belt which has seven lines of one rare kind of beads, called '*Paigen*', to the Chief of Jampi. It was obvious, when one comes with such a peace and goodwill mission that the proposal was difficult to be turned down. Therefore, accepting the proposal of the Pawis in good faith, the Chief of Lhungtin and Aiyang villages relaxed and were at peace with the Pawis, Obedience and veneration to the senior Chief were the mode of life in those days. Thus, when a senior collateral Chief advised them to stand down, there was nothing but to abide by his wishes, which they thought to be in their best interest. Accordingly, the Pawis also ceased their hostility against the three villages. But this was a lull before the storm and it lasted only for the first year[73]. Believing in what superficially appeared as being reality of the situation with complete cessation of arms hostility on the part of the Pawis, the three collateral cousin Chiefs became complacent with over-relaxation.[74]

On the other hand, the Pawis had been surreptitiously planning to attack the Lhungtin village by surprise.[75] It so happened that one night, when all the able-bodied youngmen of Lhungtin village slept in their dormitory, the Pawis stealthily came and butchered them, killing instantaneously as many as eighty able-bodied youngmen. As a result, the Hangsings were scattered and fled in different directions. Most of them were found to have settled down among the Paites.[76] The one that gave a serious impact besides ail other repercussions was that the institution of '*Sawm*' which was centralized took the character of a scattered form due to defensive strategy. Such a different form of '*Sawm*', though it still continues, exists on a small scale at different houses where there are girls.[77]

### *Sawm Kivah or Sawm Juneh*

Under the present system, some boys sleep together in different houses, where there are girls who are at the back and call of the boys[78]. They live so closely with the family of the girls that they become almost identified as being members of the family of the girls. The boys of one particular 'Sawm' help the family of the girl in all possible way, even in the matter of cultivation when the family members of the girl fail to complete it in time. When there occurs a feast of the Lawm of the village, the girl and the boys of her 'Sawm' go together taking care of each other during the feast. Sometimes it so happens that the girl becomes inebriated by over-drinking of rice-bear. In such a situation, all the boys of the 'Sawm' take special care for her and bring her home safely. Likewise, the girls take care of the boys. Even the parents and other members of the family regard the boys as part of their family.

With the passage of time, a stage came when most of the 'Sawm' members grew up. Some of them pursued diverse interests. Some had grown enough to fall in love with some other girls. Even the 'Sawm' girl had fallen in love either with a boy other than her own 'Sawm' members or with one of the 'Sawm' members.[79] They felt that time had come to part company, and that the 'Sawm' be disbanded. Under such circumstances, they considered that it was best to have a farewell party provided the parents of the girl gave consent to the proposal. When such a situation arose, the question of '*Sawm Kivah*', meaning thereby a feast of the 'Sawm' cropped up for consideration. When such a '*Sawm Kivah*' is proposed, the members of one particular 'Sawm', the number of which varies between ten and twelve, discuss the proposal with the parents of a 'Sawm' girl. If they agree, a date for it is decided upon and preparations start for the same Normally, the young boys buy a small pig which is kept under the charge of the parents of the girl. As the day for such 'Sawm Kivah' approaches, the girl of the 'Sawm' also requests her close friends to prepare a few pots of 'Zu' (rice feer) by way of helping her for the occasion. Those girls will, in their turn, ask their friends to help them. Thus, a chain of help for preparation of '*Zu*' for the '*Sawm Kivah*' is sought. Ultimately almost all the girls of the village are involved in this function. The same is true in the case of the boys of the 'Sawm'. Each of the 'Sawm' members asks his close friends to join him on the occasion. Ultimately, boys of the whole village are covered In accepting such invitations each of the boy friend invited contributes one pot of 'Zu' on the day. Finally, it becomes usually the affairs of the whole village, though it is initially thought to be an affair only for a small group of ten or twelve boys.[80] Of course, the particular boy members of the 'Sawan' bear the bulk of the expenditure for the occasion.

In the previous evening of the night before the 'Sawm Kivah', the members of the 'Sawm' serve one pot of 'Zu' to the parents of the girl wherein the Chief of the village along with his Council of Ministers, the Priest, the '*Tucha*' and '*Becha*' relatives of the parents of the girl are invited. The '*Sawm*' members will request them all to join them in the feast and to extend all possible help to make the occasion a success.

Early, the next morning, the '*Tucha*' and the '*Becha*' relatives of the girls' parents do all the needful[81]. They take up the entire responsibility for the function. As the meat is cooked, all the invitees are asked to have it to their heart's content. But the Chief and his Council of Ministers, the Priest and the father of the girl or, in his place, his '*Becha Bul*' will take the '*Sapang*' or the head portion of the pig In addition to this group of people, another group of the members of the '*Sawm*', which hosts the feast and their '*Sawm-Nu*', the girl of the '*Sawm*', are given a portion of the meat kept apart by the '*Becha*' of the girls' parents. The rest of the people take the feast at random, as normal feasting is done, without any formality.

On this day, the drinking method of the '*Zu*' is such that apart from all other ports of '*Zu*' served on the day, two particular pots are separately kept and these are served at a special place. One of them is the pot contributed by the boys of the 'Sawm', who host the feast. The other is the pot contributed by the parents of the girl. The 'Zu' contributed by the boys of the 'Sawm' is first sipped by the Chief, followed by the Prtiest and then the father of the girl. Sometimes the mother of the girl is also included in this sipping spree. The style of sipping is that one full bottle of water is the measuring level called '*Aleng*'.[82] The bottle of water is poured to the pot of '*Zu*' without ceasing, and whoever sips the 'Zu' is made to do so without ceasing until his level of sipping is finished. The level of sipping for important persons is made double the normal level. The same is done to the other pot of '*Zu*' offered by the girl's parents, which is given to the boys of the '*Sawm*'. The order of sipping among the 'Sawm' members is that the leadei of the '*Sawm*', called '*Sawm Upa*', sips first. He is followed by others in order of seniority. While the 'Sawm' members sip, they are tied with a rope on their waist and bound to a place upon the rafter of the building, so that they do not run away being unable to do justice to the level of sipping fixed for them Thus, the '*Zu*' contributed by the parents of the girl is sipped by the boys of the 'Sawm' and the girl, while the pot of '*Zu*' contributed by the boys is sipped by the Chief and his Council of Ministers, the Priest, the father of the girl or his '*Becha*' simultaneously. All the other pots of '*Zu*' prepared on that day is served for drinking only and not for sipping.

The next day is meant for the Chief and his Council of Ministers, the Priest and the '*Tucha*' and the '*Becha*' relatives of the girl's father. A feast is arranged for them only and the pride of place is given to them by offering the head portion of the slaughtered pig. In doing so, each of those who had the privilege of eating the '*Sapang*' brings one jar of '*Zu*' each. On the other hand, the boys of the 'Sawm' who host the feast provide the meat for the day. They may buy another pig or some of their friends may make a gift of some cocks for the purpose. These are flayed, cooked and eaten along with the leaders who are offered the meat with '*Zu*' on the day After the feast, the ciders retire With the approach of the evening, the young boys and girls collect themselves at one place with a view to passing the night in singing and dancing.

On the stipulated third day of the feast, the young boys and girls, belonging to some other '*Sawm*' would come with gifts of '*Zu*' and other eatables to help their friends who hosted the feast. In this way, they continue the feast for the third day. On this day, however, the elders do not take part in the feast or in the drinking bout. At the close of this day's feasting and drinking, the '*Sawm Kivah*' comes to an end.

Thus, the beginning of gradual dissolution of the old members of the 'Sawm', which has hosted the feast, is initiated. On this occasion some of the boy members get betrothed or marry a girl. In case there is a younger sister of the disbanded Sawm girl, the sister continues to care for the remaining junior 'Sawm' members who may like to continue in the same '*Sawm*' where they have so long been junior members, instead of joining some other '*Sawm*'.

It is, therefore, in an entirely different situation that the 'Sawm' institution survives today. In view of the fact that the society is changing, most of the boys and girls have started looking for greener pastures of social mobility in the urban areas of the country. Despite this, the old system of '*Sawm*' in somewhat decentralized form still survives. But among the Lushai Kukis in Mizoram, the institution has been abolished in view of fast changing situation in society.

## II. Kut Festival

The people now inhabiting Mizoram, the tribes in the Hill areas of Manipur other than the Naga dominant areas, the Kukis of Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the people in the Chin State of Myanmar are the tribes who have been professing observance of various kinds of *Kut Festivals* from time immemorial. They all practice Jhum cultivation as the mainstay of economy, growing, millet, maiza, sisamum, Job's Ear, Cucumber, pumpkin, etc., as their staple foods prior to their entry into Myanmar from China. These groups of people were said to have taken to rice cultivation only after their entry into Myanmar. Such contentions cannot, however, be substantiated as to the truth of the claims. These are more of legends than of historical facts. They are of conjectural work. In fact, their hoary past is shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, the fact remain that these people have been observing *Kut Festivals* for generations.

These people commonly claim to have come "out of the bowels of the earth, a cave called *Chhiniung* or *Sinlung* or *Khul*, believed to be in China". One of the authorities on the Kukis, Lt. Col. J. Shakespear',[83] in his book on *The Lushai Kuki Clan* said that they were of many clans, each speaking different dialect and scattering over an area of 25,000 square miles. The then Governor of Assam, Sir Robert Reid,[84] in his book on "*History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*" said that these people who claimed to have come out of the bowels of the earth speak dialects of the same language". Similarly, Dr. Grierson, a linguist, said that they belonged to the Tibeto-Kuki sub-linguistic group in his book on "Linguistic Survey of India".

## *Origin of Religious Rituals*

During the olden days, the people who observed Kut festivals were not aware of the existence of the great religions of the world, such as, Christianity, Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., etc. Thus as were true in all cases of other antiquated societies, these groups of people were either atheists, or professed ancestral worshippers (animists) or naturists. In any form of these worships, certain objects as sources of life and of other worldly nature were attributed. Their belief was, therefore, associated either with animate or inanimate objects as the sources of all powers that gave life to mankind with abundance of blessings if particular aspect of life was made subservient to it. Likewise, when the said supernatural object was believed not satisfied or was displeased, all sorts of evil fortunes were attributed to it. With this end in view, the people worshipped the objects with certain prescribed rituals in propitiation.

In order to appease not to harm mankind or to praise such objects for the blessings received, propitiation of supposed supernatural objects for the benefit and welfare of the community was performed by a socially acceptable person to mediate between the people and the objects attributed as supernatural. Such person to officiate performance of the rituals was considered 'holy man' called 'village priest'.

Such activities that interceded between the supernatural object and the society being of collective welfare in nature, observance of certain occasions as Kuts and the rituals associated therewith were essentially of community in nature.

Rites and rituals give strong elements of ethnic affinity and influence on their social cohesion and solidarity. It also symbolizes the integrating force among the community, cutting across tribal boundaries and linguistic differences.

Thus, observance of different kinds of Kut is originated from the worship of various objects considered as supernatural associated with good and evil attributes of life

## *Concept of Kut*

Radcliffe Brown and Emille Dirkheim said that the principal function of communal rituals was to emphasise and to reaffirm the sentiments of collective loyalty. The purpose of such festive function was to create a sense of identity and social solidarity reinforced by the performance of communal rituals which expressed social content and behaviour of a group.

The means of subsistence of the people who observed Kut festivals was agricultural products. Annual communal feasts manifested the type of economy being pursued by the society. The glaring fact that lacked the concept of saving in their economic system could be observed from the practice of conspicuous consumption through the various Kuts in festivity and communal rituals in propitiation to the deities of Kuts. Also, an important aspect that associated inseparably with Kut festivals was religiosity of the occasions that stemmed from obeisance and incantation to the creator of all things which preceded the celebration.

Kut festival is a thanksgiving practice to the almighty, creator of the Universe, who blesses the people through the deities of various crops cultivated. There might have, been many Kuts celebrated in the olden days of variegated and seasonal ones. However, there are some Kut festivals common to all tribes. They are—[85]

(1) *Man Kut* (Job'ear);
(2) *Chavang Kut* (paddy);
(3) *Pawl Kut* (Gourd harvest);
(4) *Thai or Thak Lop* (crops).

Hence, as the names suggest, Kut observance is invariably done with the arrival of the new crops or after harvesting as the case may be.

The basic concept behind such observance is, therefore, that the toiling community has to have a short respite and recreation after the year s work has been reaped and before the new-year's work is begun. It is also an occasion when the village community praise God for the blessing given to them.

The religious rites that precede the Kut celebration are officiated by the 'holy-man' called, 'Village Priest', who intercedes for the villagers to the deities of the Kuts concerned.

Observance of Kuts by our forefathers was marked by may significant rituals. Some salient features are given as follows briefly.

In the early hour of the morning of Kut, the man in-charge of information of the village, called, 'Tangsampa' or 'Lhangsampa' or 'Tualteekpa', etc., etc., would herald the advent of Kut, shouting aloud, throughout the village with the words,

The sun rises, the sun rises;
the sky is clear, the sky is clear;

and would enter every household, arming himself with a burning torch of fire-wood in his left hand and a hammer in his right hand, saying,[86]

Your days are over, you evil spirit
Be away from our midst, and
be with your wife and children.
We are sick of your filthy waste.

Having performed his part, he will handover the proceedings to the Village Priest'. Then, the 'Village Priest' shall arrange jars of Ju (rice bear) for all the villagers to sip, aid shall intercede for all the villagers to the deities of harvests.

The common ritualistic rites for this purpose are the offering of a cock and a bowl of rice placed at the altar of the deities. The rice is crushed to turn it into powder. The neck of the cock is throttled and cut with a sharp knife, and that the blood that oozes out therefrom is strewn on the altar and on the powdered rice.

Thereafter, the village priest shall start sipping the *Ju* from the 'Jar' prepared for the occasion. The priest shall spit out the first mouthful of *Ju* he thus sipped which is called *Juphi* (spraying of the

*Ju*) in symbolic offering to the deities. He then shall invite the Chief of the village followed by the eldest villager present to start sipping of the Ju. The sipping-bout continues by turn till the last person. With it, the celebration commences being followed soon by drinking, singing, merry-making, dancing, sporting and feasting.

It is time when even the poorest man of the village forgets his state of poverty.

## Growth

With the passage of time, contacts with the outside communities entered into the fibre of their social life. People who observed such Kut festivals became aware of the world beyond their own small community. Gradually, western education began to hold its roots followed by Christianity that propagated to dispense with hitherto known 'culture and tradition'. Ultimately, when increasing number of people started embracing Christianity, the customary observance of Kut became less and less important and ignored, culminating in complete abandonment of the same. People have almost forgotten even the existence of such a 'cultural heritage' as the Kul festivity.[87]

Identity of a community is known by its rich cultural heritage and perpetuation thereof, Rapid vanishing of the age-old tradition and direction placed the resurgent generation at a loss, and became aware of the vacuum that had been created by such abandonment of the Kut culture due to Christianity.

However, there is no conflict whatsoever between Christianity and traditional culture. The two could go hand in hand without being encroached upon each other. While the part of 'village priest' can be appropriately substituted by the role of Christian Pastor, the glamour of '*Ju*' and its resultant pleasantries can be replaced by tea and snacks, fun and frolics of all kinds, etc. More innovations can be incorporated into the system while retaining the intrinsic social values.

Modernized items, such as, beauty contest and fashion show are the recent programme added to the Kut culture. Nowadays, *Kut* has fun observed for one day only on the first November every year.

Radcliffe Brown[88] contends that changes in the social practices reflect the changing aspects of society signifying creation of new aspects in the form of new tradition or redefinition of an old one.

Culture should not remain static. It must be dynamic in its growth, assimilating what good things have been provided by a living society, absorbing local and outside elements in its vibrant whole so as to enter into uncharted areas to make it possible to withstand the winds of change from all directions without the original framework and values being sacrificed at the altar of change and dynamism

## NOTES

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***BOOK REVIEW***

**Manisha Barua**

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## *Tribal Religions*
## Edited by S. Shyamkishore Singh

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The study of religion is as old as humanity itself. This project on *Tribal Religions* edited by Professor S. Shyamkishore Singh is an exhaustive study on the Tribal religions of India. It has twenty five illuminating papers by eminent scholars working on tribal culture and religions.

It is well known that the term 'dharma' in Sanskrit has a wide connotation and it is not a proper substitute for the world 'religion' in English. The word 'religion' is used mainly in the theological sense, but the meaning of the term 'dharma' is derived, from the root 'dhre' which means 'to bind', Dharma is, therefore, the binding force of the society. The other meanings of *dharma* are law, rule of life, customs, moral codes, duties, virtue, righteousness etc.

The manifold character of the term 'dharma' finds proper expression in the various papers on tribal religions. A careful study of the various papers exhibit the variety and manifold nature of the use of the term religion which is used in the sense of custom, practice, rule, law, culture, way of life, morality etc. and not simply as the belief in spiritual beings (as defined by Tylor) or the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of the nature of absolute Mind (Hegel) or "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual man in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (William James).

Professor S. Shyamkishore Singh in his 'Introduction' clearly states the distinguishing marks of Tribal religion. To quote him "The issue is: which sense of religion is relevant to the tribal life world and system of belief in the supernatural? The generic term "tribal religion" is not the nomenclature which can be used to an established religion in the historical sense, i.e. in the term "religion" as applied to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism etc."

Max Müller, the German Philosopher and indologist gave us a distinction between Tribal Religion, Natural Religion and World Religion, a distinction made on the basis of the level of spiritual development on the size of the group or communities who belong to those religions. According to Max Müller, the faith and the belief and practices of the tribal religion are limited to that tribe alone. National religion is higher than tribal religion since the level of spiritual consciousness is much higher, and it is the religion of the nation. World religions, like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are still higher because the concepts of spirit, Holy Scriptures, prophet etc. are more pronounced and these religions have spread to different parts of the world.

According to William James, religions fall into three major groups sacramental, prophetic and mystical. Sacramental religion lays stress on rituals and sacramental objects, prophetic religion lays stress on belief in the prophet and mystical religion gives importance to feelings and experiences. Tribal religions fall within the first category.

As there is no common characteristic which can be discerned in the twenty five papers written on tribal religion, I shall take up each paper in brief, though animistic trait is common to all the tribal religions.

Jayanta Sarkar in his paper on "Tribal Religion in India: its nature of persistence" comments that in order to know and have a proper understanding of the tribes of India it is necessary to have a detailed knowledge about the basic characteristics of the tribal religions. According to Tylor, the elementary form out of which all tribal religions developed was animism. The minimum definition of religion as "a belief in spiritual beings" was the basis out of which religion arose at its primitive stage. In the course of his writing, Sarkar mentioned that the tribal religions were in constant contact with Hinduism as a result of which these religions imbibed many ideas of Hinduism. Tribes in India were gradually getting absorbed into the Hindu fold and they began to worship the deities of the Hindus, specially Lakshmi, though they retained many of the traditional deities. Sarkar revealed many characters of tribal religion by citing important examples which he found as a result of the project "Tribal India: Structure, Pattern and Transformation" initiated by the Anthropological Survey of India. The conclusions arrived at by Sarkar after a detailed study bear important ideas which serve as guidelines for the study of tribal religions in India. He, not only pointed out to the Hindu contacts of the tribal people, but also referred to the influence of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam due to conversion on social and economic grounds. However, they also retained many of their traditional beliefs and practices which are unique features of their own religions.

In his paper on "Defining the Indigenous Tribal Religion" Gangumei Kamei examined critically E.B. Tylor's concept of animism which dominated the religion of the primitive people. According to Kamei, there was a mass conversion of the tribal people to Christianity. The Christian missionaries had condemned the tribal religions as heathens, pagan and animistic. Their religion was described as the worship of demons and evil spirits. The tribal converts to Christianity condemned their own religion as animism. However, enlightened scholars of the tribal community refuse to accept the derogatory terms and sympathized their own religion. Kamei also mentioned about the Primal Religion which has proposed as a term to replace animism. The word "Primal" means basic and primal religions have their basic features which are common to all religions.

In the paper on "Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Idu Mishimis of Arunachal Pradesh" Sarit Kumar Choudhuri deals with the religion of the Idu Mishimis who are considered to be one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Choudhuri's paper is based on research as an anthropologist and throws light on the life, culture and religion of the Idu Mishimis. The concept of *Igu* is very significant in the religious world of the Idu Mishimis. Every aspect of their religion is dominated by the Igu to realize their end. The Igus play a vital role in their festivities, social institutions and life cycle.

In the paper "Religious rituals and ceremonies of the Apatanis" Takhe Kani mentioned that the religious life of the Apatanis are determined by their beliefs and practices developed on the basis of mythology and experiences. They believe in Supernatural Beings which are propitiated by offerings, religious rites and ceremonies to please these Unseen Supernatural Beings. The Apatanis also believe that the world is full of *wuhi* or the malevolent and the benevolent gods and goddesses. They believe that the Mother Sun and Father Moon must bestow their kindness on human beings.

In the paper "Missing Religion" by Basanta Kumar Doley throws light on the Missings and their indigenous religion who resided in Arunachal Pradesh. These tribes were known as Miri in the past. The religion of the Missings basically rested on the appeasement of spirits to pacify the evil eyes of angry spirits. The Missings believed that this universe is regulated by *ui* or *uyu* (spirits) which are either malevolent or benevolent, who are responsible for various events or phenomena. Death, disease, destruction, misfortune etc. are due to these evil spirits.

In the paper "The religion of the Karbis" Jagadish Patgiri has dealt with the culture and religion of the Karbis who belonged to the Karbi Anglong district of north-east India, and they were previously known as the Mikirs. Patgiri has remarked that the Karbis have their own social system though they have many similarities with the rituals of Hinduism. Dance and song played a vital role in the religious ceremonies of the Karbis. The Karbis have a firm faith in the law of Karma but they have no idols, temples or shrines.

In the paper "On the traditional religions of the Rabha's", Upen Rabha Hakacham gives a detailed description of the religious beliefs and practices of the Rabha tribe of Assam. The two Hindu cults of Saivism and Saktism have influenced the Rabha religion. Sanskrit terms like *Dharma, Pap, Punya, Santi, Mukti, Bhakti, Puja, Satya, Swarga* and *Naraka* etc. are used by the Rabhas. The Rabhas also worship spirits dwelling in plants, trees, rocks, streams and snakes, etc.

In the paper "Traditional Religion of the Garos" Bimal Mazumder gives a detailed account of Garo culture and religion. Most of the Garos of the present times have converted themselves to Christianity, but many of them are still preserving their cultural and religious heritage of the past by retaining their customs, rites, rituals and way of life.

Helen Giri's paper on the "Traditional Khasi Religion" has highlighted the religion of the Khasi people of Meghalaya. Though many of the Khasis have converted themselves to Christianity, yet the Sheng Khasis still profess their traditional religion by believing in a God who is the creator, protector and designer of the world.

In the paper "The Religion of the Boroks" Mohan Debbarma gives a detailed account of the Boroks who are tribes of Tripura. According to Debbarma, there are elements of animism, totemism, spiritism, ancestor worship etc. in the religion of the Boroks. They believe that gods have powerful souls which can influence all the happenings and events.

In the paper "The Religion of the Bodos" Hira Charan Narzinari gives a historical account of the Bodos before discussing their religion. The Bodos believe in a multitude of deities like the earth, air and sky. They are believed to be gods and goddesses who are called "Mwdai". However their chief god is Bathou who is a Supreme God and He is seen through the *Siju* tree which is the symbol.

The two papers on traditional Thadon Kuki religion by Jamkhothang Haokip and T.S. Gangte give a detailed account of the ritualistic practice and religious belief of their religion. The Thadou Kukis believe in many supernatural spirits, but they believe in a Supreme God "Chung Patten." They also respect their ancestors or departed souls.

In the papers "Traditional Religious Beliefs of the Paite (Tedim Chin)" H Kamkhenthang and "A descriptive account of Hmar Religion" by Vanlalnghak discuss about the traditional religion of the Paite who have a belief in the land of the dead (Misi Khua). The Hmar people live in Manipur, Mizoram and Assam. The Hmar religion has concepts like God, Spirits, Life after death, Heaven, abode of death etc.

Four research papers about the Naga tribe are included in this book. They are 1] "The religious life of the Poumai" by M.C. Arun kumar 2] "Some aspects of the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Naga tribes" by N. Sukumar Singh 3] Worship of Tingkao Ragwang in the indigenous religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas" by L. Gonmei and 4] "Religious beliefs and practices of the sumi tribe of Nagaland" by Hitoka Sumi and R.K. Behra.

Naga is a tribe of the Mongolaid race who live in Nagaland. They have a clear conception of God. God is the mysterious power governing the life and destiny of man and is also the creator of man, animals and nature. They have many rites and rituals connected with birth, death, marriage and warding off evil spirits. They believe in the observance of *Genna* which is a kind of prohibition of certain acts and food items.

In the paper "The Santal Religion: a review", Rajat kanti Das gives an account of the traditional beliefs and practices of the Santals. The Santals are scattered in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal etc. The Santals are associated with natural objects and animals and worship several gods and goddesses (some of them are Hindu gos) and spirits called *bengas.*

The paper on "Tribal Religion in South India" by P.R.G. Mathur is a research paper from the anthropological standpoint. Mathur mentioned about the religious practices of these tribes, beliefs and rituals, the function of the medicine man, etc. These tribes also believe in animism and ancestor worship.

In the paper "The Religion of the tribes of Tamil Nadu and Kerala", T. Madhava Menon describes the religion of these tribes of South India. Menon has described the evolution of the beliefs of these tribes from animism to monotheism. There are various forms of worship of these tribes and they believe in mysterious and infinite deity. The influence of *tantrism* is seen in the worship of Mother Goddess.

T.K. Rapaz in his paper discusses the world view and religion in the "Folklores of Mundari Speaking Tribes of India." The Mundaris or Mundas live in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal. The Mundas believe in 'Singbonga' as the Supreme Deity. They also believe in ancestral spirits for the sake of getting good harvest, relief from evils and sickness.

In the paper on "Women in Tribal religions", Debi Chatterjee reviews the nature of tribal religion and the status of women in tribal societies. He also brings to focus several social practices relating to marriage and its impact on women in the tribal societies.

After a survey of the different research papers on tribal religions certain notable features can be mentioned with regard to tribal religions.

1. Tribal religions exhibit some of the most striking features of the primitive religions. Belief in animism is the most striking feature of the tribal religions

2. Tribal religions are essentially polytheistic. Belief in natural objects like the sun, moon, rivers, clouds, streams and hills are common in tribal religions. But behind the polytheistic outlook there is the monotheistic leaning towards the belief in one Supreme God, for example the concept of Bathou in the Bodo religion.
3. Influence of Hinduism is well pronounced in most of the tribal religions.
4. The role of emotion is very significant in the tribal religions specially fear and dread. Intellectual exercise is not very common in the tribal religions.
5. As fear of malevolent spirits dominate the tribal religions, offerings and sacrifices to these spirits are common in order to propitiate them.
6. Ancestor worship is common to most of the tribal religions.
7. Due to the excessive influence of either Hinduism or Christianity there is a gradual transition of the tribal religions from the crude animistic worship to the more refined forms of worship.
8. Like any other religion the tribal religion acts as a great cohesive force and tend to create unity and social bond amongst its followers.

To be brief, the book on *Tribal religions* edited by Professor S. Shyamkishore Singh is exhaustive and illuminating. In throws light in most of the obscure areas associated with tribal religions. The "Introduction" of Professor Singh is a miniature dictionary of the tribal religions of India. Professor Singh has left no stone unturned to weave the beautiful garland of twenty five flowers on tribal religions scattered throughout India. This book is an important addition to the researches carried out in the field of Tribal Religions.

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